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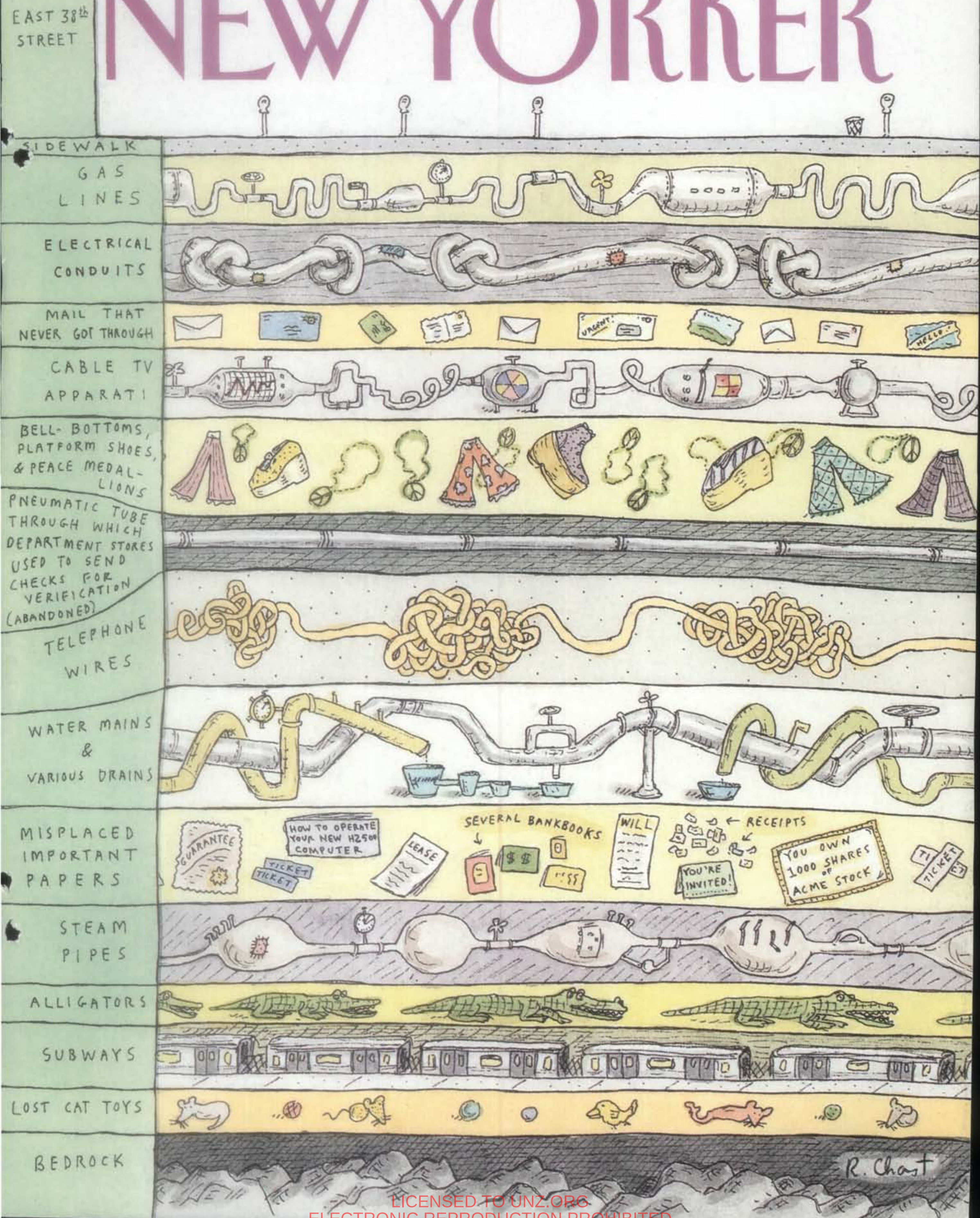
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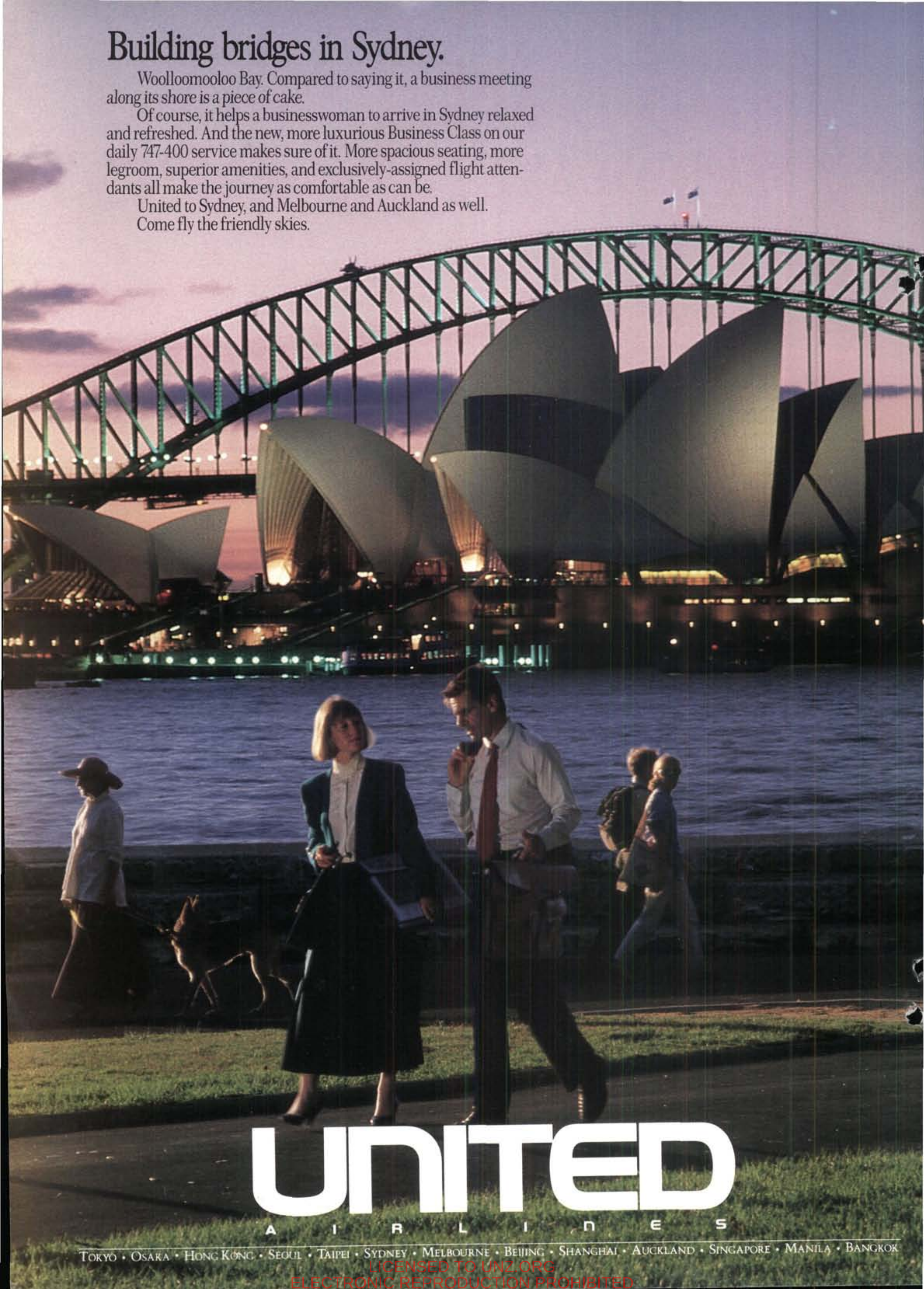

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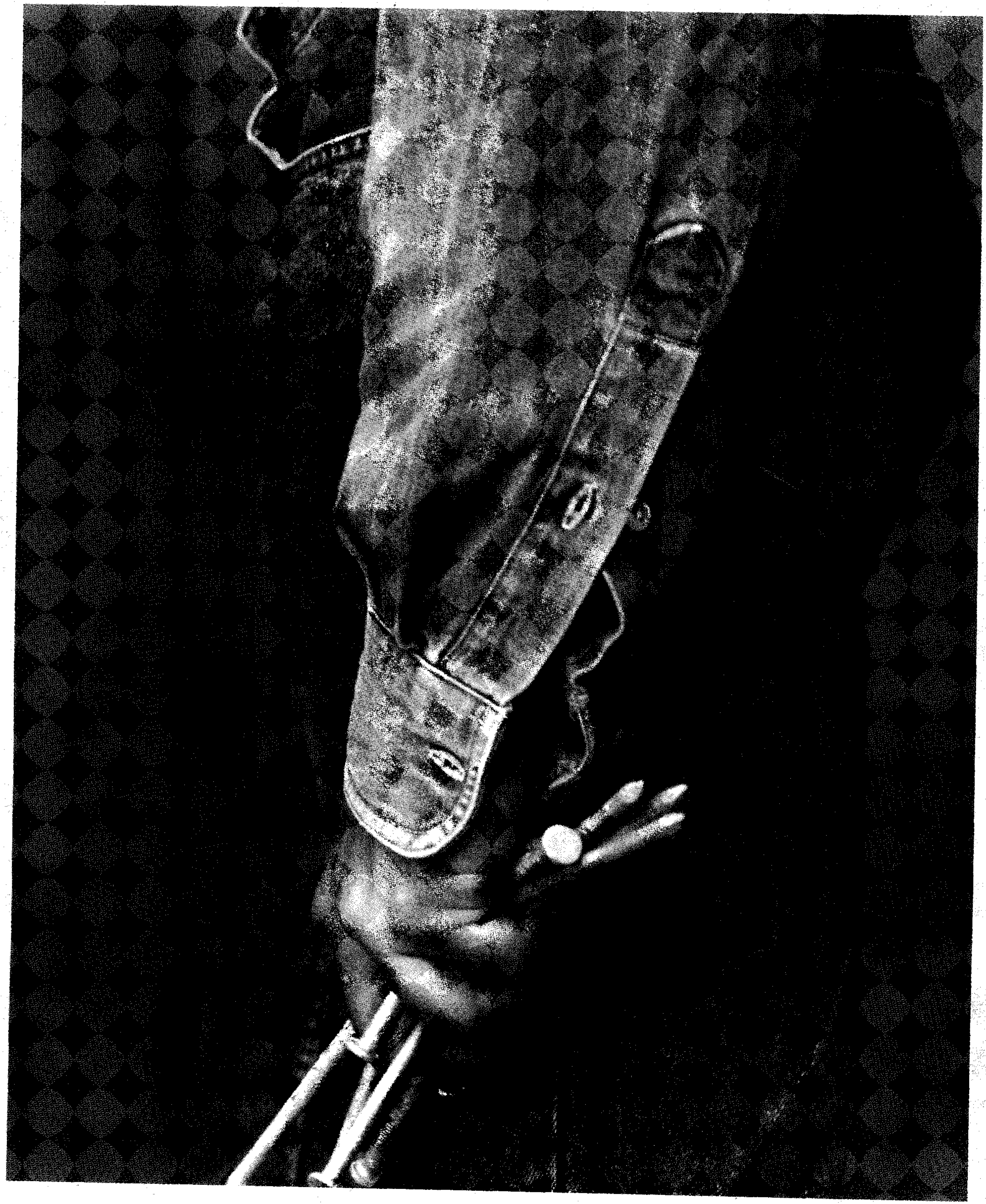

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

THE THEATRE

ON the way out of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company's revival of Charles Ludlam's "Camille, A Tearjerker," we did something we hardly ever do—stopped and bought a T-shirt, partly because we liked the design but mostly in homage to a memorable evening in the theatre. The production, which stars Everett Quinton, Mr. Ludlam's disciple and spiritual heir (and the company's artistic director), in the title role, is almost as good as drag theatre gets. Of course, the trouble with drag theatre is that there's rarely much to say about a particular piece beyond noting how long it remains funny. Usually that's not terribly long. (Drag has a hard time sustaining its subject.) What makes artists like Ludlam so rare (and when we say "artists like" him, we mean Charles Busch, John Epperson, and the boys over at La Gran Scena Opera Company, which Symphony Space will be presenting next month) is that they seem to have a genius for knowing what stories, themes, and cadences are best served by drag. "Camille" represents Ludlam at his most perversely insightful and gives Quinton a chance to play the whore on a grand scale.

Another brave lady who will be stepping into a hard-act-to-follow situation is Patricia Norcia, who is back next month performing two evenings of Ruth Draper monologues at the Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. We went to see Miss Norcia there last season, and became instantly fond of her showmanship and subtlety. In the middle of "The Japanese Love Song," for instance, she touched up her lipstick, just to prove that she was hardly moving her mouth at all.

This year, Miss Norcia will be performing "The Italian Lesson" and "In a Church in Italy" on October 14. The following evening, she will do "The Actress," along with "Doctors and Diets," which she hasn't performed before.

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

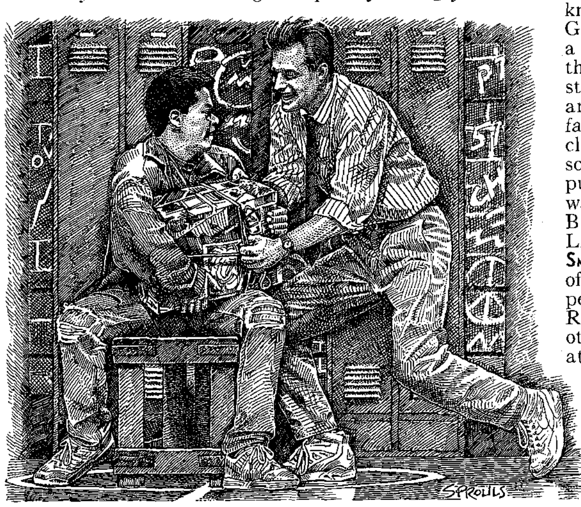
(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for schedule and ticket information.)

MICHAEL FEINSTEIN IN CONCERT: PIANO AND VOICE—Mr. Feinstein in a limited engagement that opens Oct. 2 at 8, and runs through Oct. 27. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE MISER—Philip Bosco, Carole Shelley, and Mia Dillon star in Molière's comedy. Directed by Stephen Porter. In previews. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

OH, KAY!—David Merrick's new production of the Gershwins' 1926 musical comedy. The setting has been moved from Long Island to Harlem, and James Racheff has written a new book, based on the original by Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse. Angela Teek and Brian Mitchell lead the large cast; Dan Siretta directed. Previews begin Sept. 29. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 221-1211.)

STAND-UP TRAGEDY—Jack Coleman and Marcus Chong in a play by Bill Cain. Previews begin Sept. 25. (Criterion Center Stage Right, Broadway at 45th St. 239-6200.)



Marcus Chong and Jack Coleman in "Stand-Up Tragedy"

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RECENTLY OPENED

ASPECTS OF LOVE—Andrew Lloyd Webber's latest extravaganza, based on David Garnett's frail 1955 novel of the same title, aspires to good taste and sophistication (it's about artists and theatre folk rather than cats or trains) but ends up being a monument to vulgarity. The combination of Garnett's triviality and Lloyd Webber's pretentiousness produces something so empty it implodes. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/23/90.) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

BIG, FAT, AND UGLY WITH A MOUSTACHE—A play by Christopher Widney, with Evan O'Meara, David Beach, Alison Martin, and Brian Howe. The director was Stone Widney. (Perry Street Theatre, 31 Perry St. 869-3530.)

BY AND FOR HAVEL—A pair of one-acters in revival. "By"—**AUDIENCE**—is based on an episode that occurred when Václav Havel had a menial job in a brewery; "for"—**CATASTROPHE**—is Samuel Beckett's poetic tribute to Havel when he was in prison. Together, they make an evening that is both comic and stirring. With Kevin O'Connor and Lou Brockway. (3/19/90) (John Houseman Studio Theatre, 450 W. 42nd St. 564-8038.)

CAMILLE, A TEARJERKER—A revival of Charles Ludlam's 1973 play. With Everett Quinton (who also directed), Georg Osterman, and Eureka. (Charles Ludlam Theatre, 1 Sheridan Square. 691-2271.)

CARREÑO—A show based on the life of Teresa Carreño, the Venezuelan composer, pianist, conductor, and singer. Written and performed by Pamela Ross. Directed by Gene Frankel. (Intar, 420 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

FALSETTOLAND—This latest installment of a three-part cantata by William Finn (music and lyrics) is a sequel to "In Trousers" and "March of the Falsettos." Mr. Finn's story presents a number of new elements (among them a bar mitzvah in the hospital room of a man who is dying of AIDS) before dissolving in its own syrup. The music sounds agreeable enough, and the performance goes smoothly, under the direction of James Lapine. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 924-8782.)

FOREVER PLAID—Stuart Ross's loving, tongue-in-cheek salute to the "guy groups" of the fifties is a real treat. The performances of Jason Graae, Stan Chandler, David Engel, and Guy Stroman (as the Plaids, a close-harmony group snuffed out in the prime of life and brought back to earth for a single evening) are so deadpan, and the songs (arranged by James Raitt) are rendered at such a heightened pitch of musical good faith, that only from Ross's script and choreography would you know the thing is a parody. Bring your mom. Hell, bring the whole family. (Steve McGraw's, 158 W. 72nd St. 595-7400.)

FURTHER MO'—This lively, touching, and brilliantly performed small-scale musical, set in a New Orleans vaudeville theatre in 1927, is a real gem. Written by Vernel Bagneris (who also stars), it uses blues singing (mostly quite recherché songs) to say something about the plight of the black entertainer in American history and culture. (Village Gate, 160 Bleecker St. 475-5120.)

HOSANNA—Michel Tremblay's 1973 play, with David McCann and David DeBeck. (Actors Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 691-6226.)

IT'S STILL MY TURN—Terry Sweeney portrays Nancy Reagan in this one-man show. (Actors Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 691-6226.)

LETTICE & LOVAGE—The marvellous Maggie Smith plays Lettice Douffet, a freewheeling guide to England's stately homes, and the elegant Margaret Tyzack plays a reprimanding envoy sent by Lettice's employers in Peter Shaffer's merry comedy about an unlikely friendship and other matters. Paxton Whitehead and Bette Henritze are effective in supporting roles. Michael Blakemore was the director. (4/9/90) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

LUSTING AFTER PIPINO'S WIFE—A comedy by Sam Henry Kass, presented by the Primary Stages Company. (45th Street Theatre, 354 W. 45th St. 333-7471.)

MEN OF MANHATTAN—T. L. Reilly and Richard Skipper in a play by John Glines. (Courtyard Playhouse, 39 Grove St. 869-3530.)

MISALLIANCE—Shaw's comedy, presented by the Jean Cocteau Repertory company. Directed by Casey Kizziah. (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

THE PIANO LESSON—August Wilson's newest drama, the fourth in his series chronicling the black-American experience in the twentieth century, is set in Pittsburgh in 1936. In its exquisite writing and over-all structure (involving the conflict over a piano that figures hauntingly and intricately in one family's history) the play resembles "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" more than "Fences." Wilson takes refuge in an overly mystical and melodramatic ending, but there are some great scenes—even if the subtle ensemble acting in Lloyd Richards' production is thrown out of balance by an excessive performance by Charles S. Dutton. (Keith Smith fills in for Mr. Dutton Sept. 25-29.) (4/30/90) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 582-4022.)

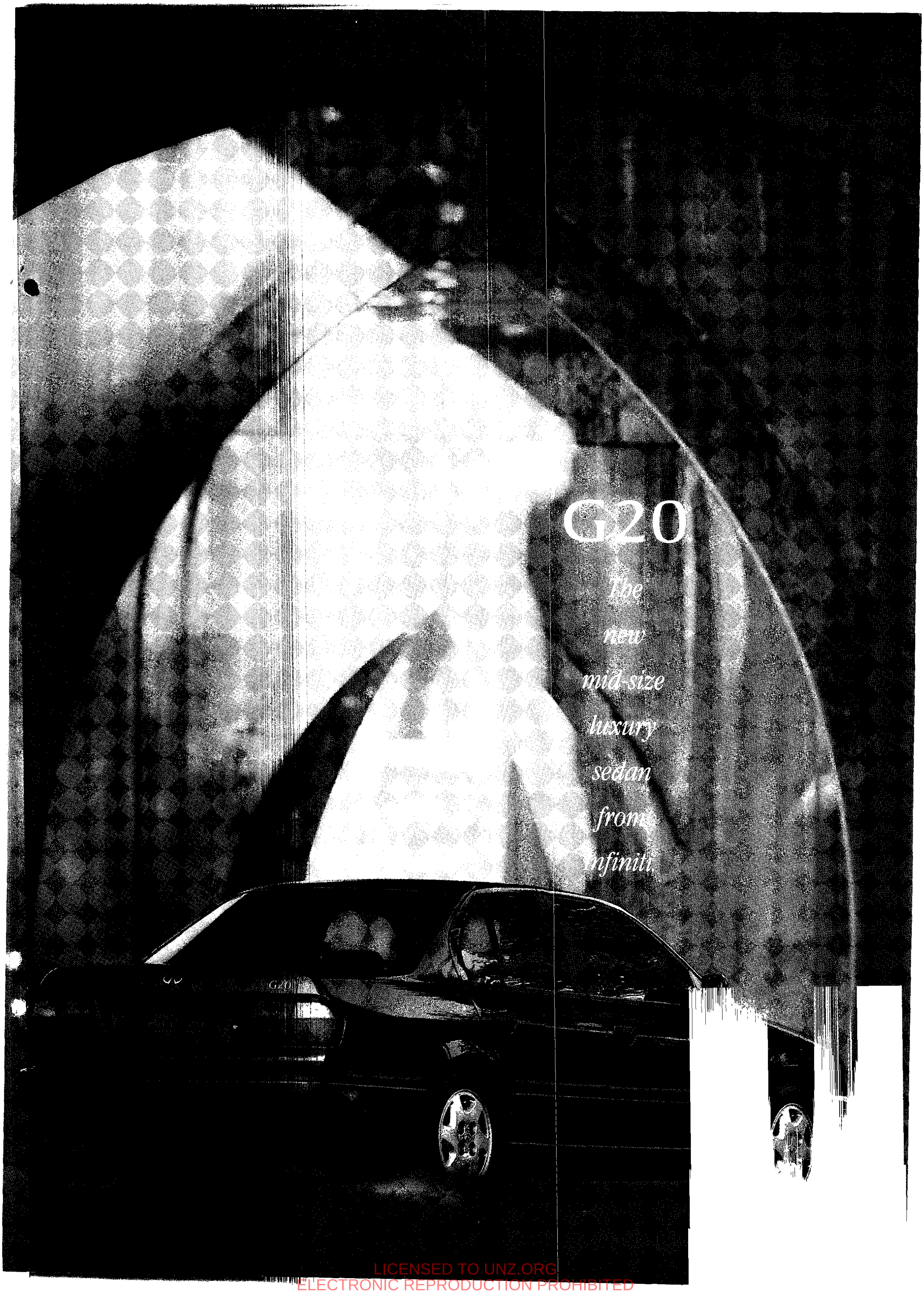
PRELUDE TO A KISS—Craig Lucas's entertaining romantic comedy slips into fantasy when an old man kisses a bride at her wedding. Barnard Hughes is the old man, Mary-Louise Parker is the bride, and Timothy Hutton is the groom. (3/26/90) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 944-9450.)

THE ROTHSCHILDS—A revival of the 1970 musical by Jerry Bock (score), Sheldon Harnick (lyrics), and Sherman Yellen (book), with a sixteen-member cast led by Mike Burstyn. (Circle in the Square Downtown, 159 Bleecker St. 254-6330.)

SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION—You're best off knowing nothing about the new John Guare play, other than that it represents a perfect meeting of the playwright and the director, Jerry Zaks. Out of a true story—one apparently about celebrity and Good Samaritanism—Guare has fashioned a wistful comedy about race, class, money, imagination, collective conscience, individual psyche, and the impulse toward art. What more do you want? With Swoosie Kurtz and Courtney B. Vance. (6/25/90) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

SMOKE ON THE MOUNTAIN—This loving satire of old-time gospel music, set in 1938, is perfectly delightful. Written by Connie Ray (who also performs, along with six other versatile actor-musicians), it re-creates a Saturday-night service at a small church in rural North Carolina, where a family of more or less devout gospel singers have been invited to appear. (Lambs Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 997-1780.)

THROUGH THE LEAVES—A revival of a 1984 production of a play by Franz Xaver Kroetz. With Ruth Maleczech and Frederick Neumann. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 596-8150. Closes Oct. 14.)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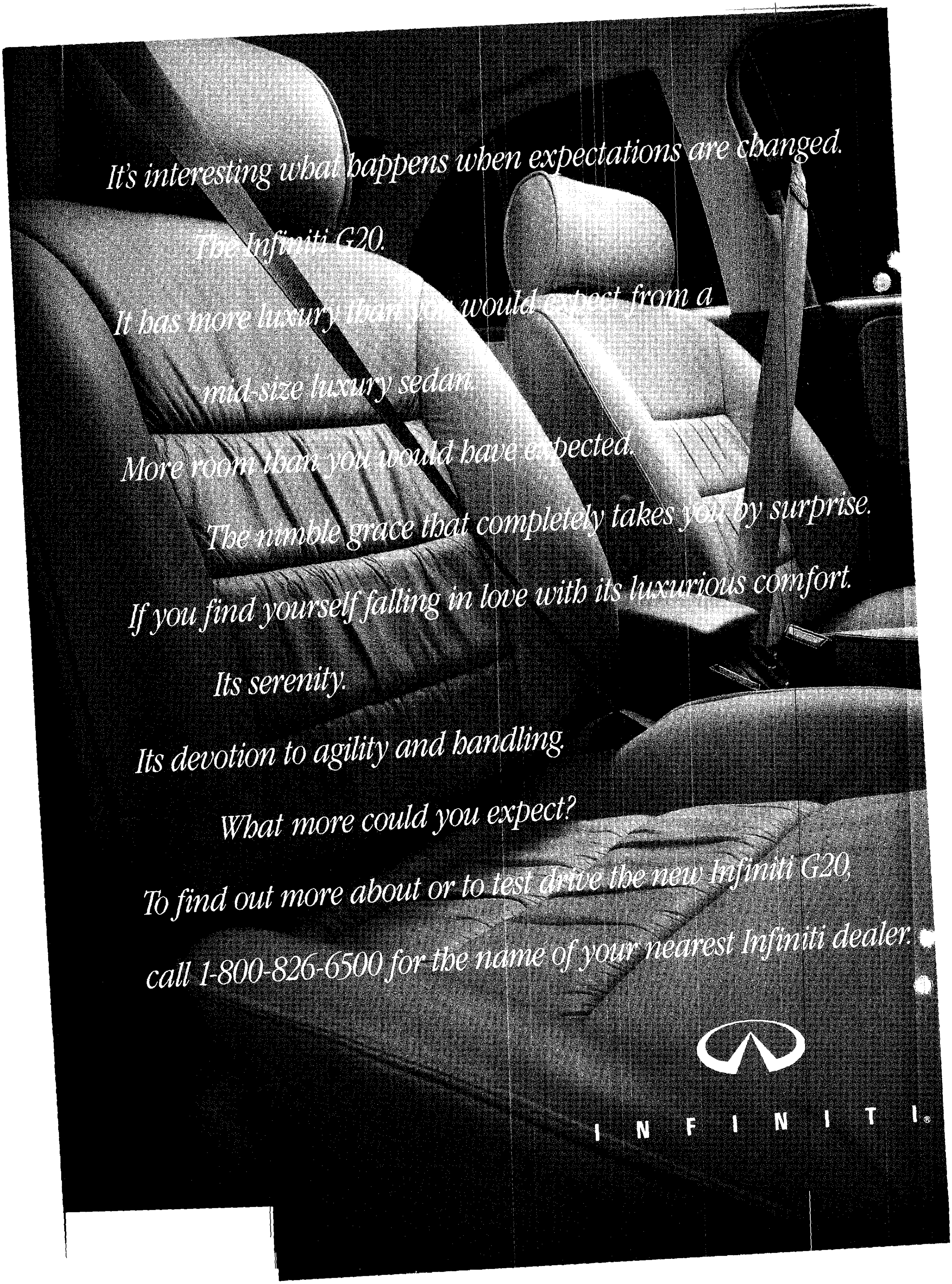

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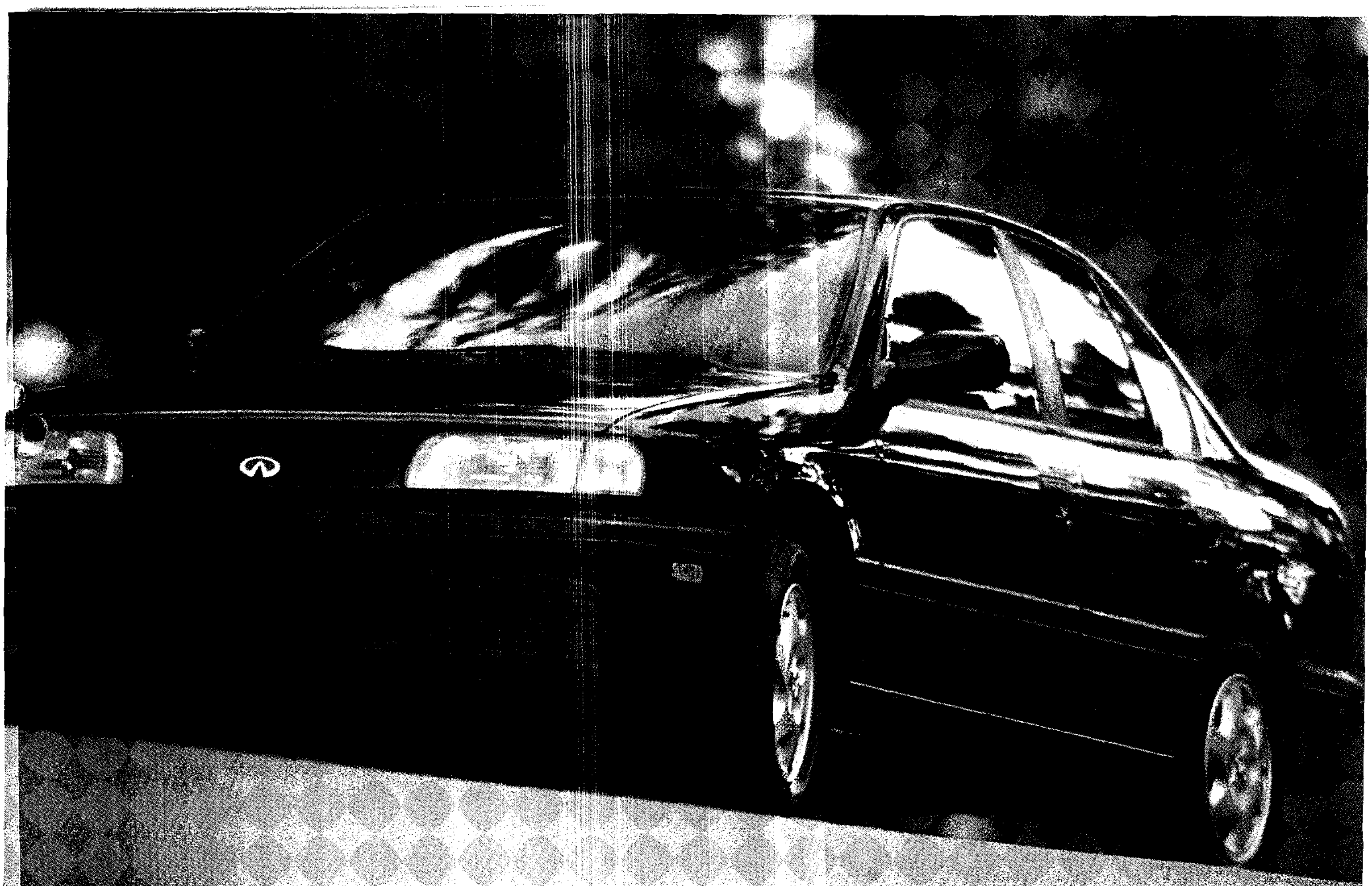

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THE THEATRE–Cont'd

Whatnot—A musical comedy conceived and written by Howard Crabtree and Mark Waldrop, with a score and lyrics by Dick Gallagher. Mr. Crabtree, John Treacy Egan, Mark Lazore, and Jennifer Smith make up the cast; Mr. Waldrop directed. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. Closes Oct. 6. For information about tickets, call 688-6022.)

Young Playwrights Festival—Presenting "Hey Little Walter," by Carla Alleyne; "Believing," by Allison Birch; "Mutterschaft," by Gregory Clayman; and "Psychoneurotic Phantasies," by Gilbert Feke. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Oct. 6.)

LONG RUNS

ACK AND BLUE: An evening of classic blues and jazz, conceived, designed, and directed by Claudio Segovia and Héctor Orezzoli, who created "Tango Argentino" in a similarly commemorative but far less visually opulent style. Musicians of renown have been assembled, and while La Vern Baker, Linda Hopkins, and Carrie Smith sing, a troupe of hoofers young and old give the tap-dance subculture a workout. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 246-0102.) . . . **CATS:** Some twenty poems about cats by T. S. Eliot, set to music by Andrew Lloyd Webber. A mighty spectacle about mighty little, owing its effectiveness to Trevor Nunn's direction and to John Napier's sets and costumes. (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200.) . . . **CITY OF ANGELS:** Larry Gelbart, dramatist; Cy Coleman, composer; Billy Byers, arranger; James Naughton and Gregg Edelman, leading men; and Michael Blakemore, director, are all in top form in this sharp, jokey musical satire about Hollywood in the forties. The plot concerns the making of a private-eye movie (and the unmaking of its author). The spectacular settings and costumes were designed by Robin Wagner and Florence Klotz and lighted by Paul Gallo. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 246-0102.) . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** The longest-running long run celebrated its thirtieth birthday last May. (Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.) . . . **A FEW GOOD MEN:** "Mister Roberts" meets "The Mary Tyler Moore Show." Aaron Sorkin's military-courtroom drama treats issues such as justice, honor, loyalty, and morality with the slick, facile smugness of a half-hour comedy series. Directed by Don Scardino. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.) . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 1990:** A source of continual merriment, this revue is a cluster of parodies of shows along the Great White Way. Gerard Alessandrini conceived and directed it, and wrote the witty, barbed lyrics. (Theatre East, 211 E. 60th St. 838-9090.) . . . **GRAND HOTEL:** The dazzling imagination of Tommy Tune's direction and choreography and the dazzling scenery by Tony Walton almost make up for the inner vacancy of this show, but not quite. The story and characters are skimpy and the music is undistinguished. Nevertheless, there isn't a boring moment. (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 246-0102.) . . . **GYPSY:** This revival of the great Sondheim-Styne-Laurents-Robbins musical (directed by Arthur Laurents himself) is so delightful—and the cast so engaging—that we think anyone would be happier for having seen it. One suggestion: don't applaud when Mama Rose comes down the aisle (you'll drown out the first number). With Linda Lavin. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 246-0102.) . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** The stars of this musical adaptation of the Victor Hugo novel are John Napier's settings and David Hersey's lighting. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200.) . . . **NUNSENSE:** A musical comedy by Dan Goggin. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-4321.) . . . **OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY:** Jerry Sterner's comedy about a New York corporate raider's attempt to take over a decorous New England business maintains its suspense from beginning to end. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000.) . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** The much ballyhooed Andrew Lloyd Webber musical is fun—if you're not bothered by theatre that cares not a whit for words and contains not one ghost of an idea. Except for the sets (by Maria Björnson), everything about the show is negligible. (Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

DANCE

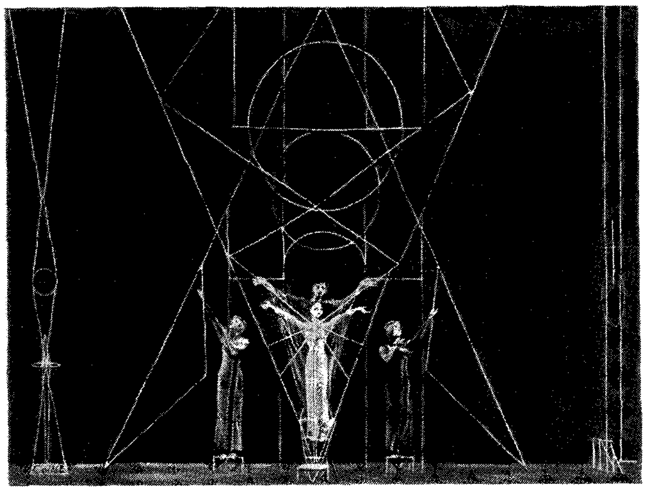
AND the Lord of Art created Samuel Beckett. And there was silence in Art Heaven for the space of a half hour. Then the Lord of Art turned to his angels and said, "Nu?" And the angel Ethereal answered, "Lord, thou hast gone and made a wit for the ages; but it's not funny." So the Lord goeth, "What do you want from Me?" So the angel goeth, "Timing one can dance to." So the Lord goeth, "Like what?" So the angel goeth, "Like the psalms of David." So the Lord—a little hard of hearing and very thirsty—poureth a Scotch and goeth, "Like *what* man?" So the angel goeth, and placeth a comma after "what," and, lo, it was good. Then the angel placeth a comma after "like," and, lo, it was better. And so, like, man, it came to pass that the world distinguished the nineteen-fifties from the nineteen-sixties, and hanging out on his lonely hassock a youth named David Gordon saw the light, and heard the music, and met Valda Setterfield, and started to make work.

Then one night in a dream, the Lord appeared to David, saying, "David, man, listen up. I want you to become chairman of a place I shall lead you to called the PoMo Corp., and Valda shall be your chief operating officer. But in return, never again say that the nuanced, amusing, rigorously principled dances you make are 'choreography.' Instead, they shall be unto you 'constructions.' And I shall turn your words and your movement into two streams of communication, linked in the ever-deepening mystery of performance. And you shall devise ever-repeating pieces, such as 'Framework' and 'T.V. Reel,' that dancegoers shall delight in, only to lose them afterward like sands that the wind carries away."

The Lord paused, and continued. "Then, years later, from October 2 through October 7, 1990, during the Age of Dance Reconstruction, you and your company shall bring back these works on a single program at Dance Theatre Workshop. And they shall be shortened, and revamped, and 'cooked anew.' And Dean Moss shall take most of Valda's part in 'Framework.' And these changes shall be as a sign of the living dance unto those who worship the false god Exactly As It Was. And though the idolaters petition and repetition Me, they shall not escape their punishment: to inhabit a world in which a construction may be reconstructed by any ballet detective, but true choreography must be rechoreographed—by working choreographers."

Martha Graham Dance Company—Opening performances of a one-week engagement that will run through Oct. 7. Oct. 2 at 8: A benefit performance. "Steps in the Street" (from "Chronicle"), "Errand Into the Maze," "Ritual to the Sun" (from "Acts of Light"), and "Maple Leaf Rag" (première). . . . ¶ Oct. 3 at 8: "Seraphic Dialogue," "Steps in the Street," "Errand Into the Maze," and "Acts of Light." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-7907.)

Cumbre Flamenca—A thirteen-member all-star troupe of Spanish flamenco dancers, singers, and guitarists. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Sept. 25-29 and Oct. 2-3 at 8, and Sept. 30 at 2 and 7:30. Through Oct. 7.)



Martha Graham's "Seraphic Dialogue"
(set by Isamu Noguchi)

Dorothy Jungels/Everett Dance Theatre—In the New York première of "Pandora's Restaurant." (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Sept. 27-29 at 8.)

Heishin Hogakukai—A *gagaku* troupe from Japan, presenting traditional court dances and orchestral and vocal music. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Oct. 2 at 8.)

David Gordon/Pick Up Company—In reconstructed versions of "Framework" and "T.V. Reel." (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Oct. 2-3 at 8. Through Oct. 7.)

NIGHT LIFE

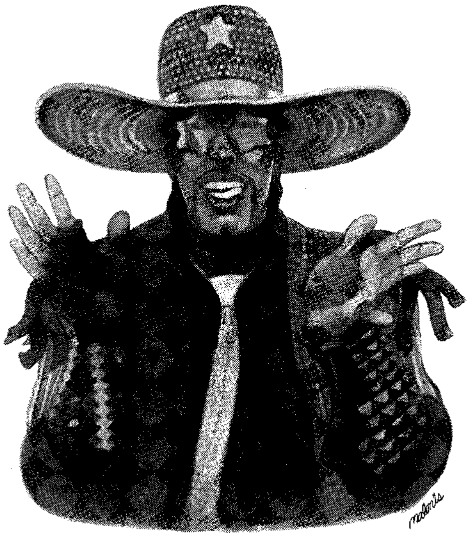
IF you're one of the six of ten New Yorkers who, according to recent polls, would just as soon pack up their wagon and get out of town, a visit to the Café Carlyle just now might serve as a reminder that the city still has a few charms left. Not only is this swanky, intimate room an example of night life at its most elegant, but the club's current occupants, the vocal team of Montgomery, Plant & Stritch, offer a repertoire of classic American song that recalls a gentler era of city life. The trio, which was formed in Houston in 1983, consists of Sharon Montgomery, a sweet-voiced redhead whose gifts include a dead-on Patti Page impersonation; Rebecca Plant, a tall brunette with a huskier, more blues-inflected voice; and Billy Stritch, who doubles on piano and whose lovable-nerd appearance suggests a stocky Rick Moranis. To standards by Rodgers & Hart, Arlen & Mercer, et al., as well as more recent compositions, the threesome brings a smart, delicately wrought style that seems to have a wide variety of influences, among them fifties radio ads and sixties movie music. Their tone is light, cool, breezily swinging, their harmonies inventive and difficult: trying to isolate an individual voice can be like a tricky maneuver in a game of pick-up-sticks. They have the ability to make familiar material surprising: an Irving Berlin medley, for instance, might not seem like the most novel idea for a cabaret act, but by packing a CD's worth of songs into a headlong four- or five-minute jamboree the trio makes the routine sound almost bold. Another winning feature is the group's non-stop banter, which, like their singing, is a close-knit ensemble effort. One number started out with the singers' simulating wave sounds, prompting the comment "Sounds like a weight-loss tape." Enter a few gull noises. "Cover your drinks," Mr. Stritch advised.

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type is used to pick out a few of the more notable performers in town. . . . ¶ Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives that are subject to last-minute change; it is therefore always advisable to call ahead.)

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—The Oak Room has at last awakened from its long summer siesta. San Francisco-bred singer **mary cleere haran,** whose shows usually involve some Gershwin, some Irving Berlin, and some funny patter about the Summer of Love, is in residence as of Sept. 25. Shows Tuesdays through Thursdays at nine-fifteen, and Fridays and Saturdays at nine-fifteen and eleven-fifteen. Dining.

Ballroom, 253 W. 28th St. (244-3005)—A sleek cabaret on the edge of Chelsea, near the flower and fur markets. Magician **jeff mc bride** works through Sept. 29. **betty,** a three-woman singing group that garnered rave notices during a recent stand here, is back for three weeks beginning Oct. 2. Their shows move at an amphetamine pace and have something for everyone—performance art, cabaret, satirical funk, standup comedy.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—The musicians who pass through this blue-on-blue club are strictly major league, but if you want to hear the big boys you've got to ante up. The Blue Note is an institution and it knows it: how many other clubs sell their own belt buckles? **michel petrucciani's** quartet can be found here Sept. 25-30, sharing the bill with an ensemble that includes **eddie gomez** and **steve gadd;** soul dinosaur **isaac hayes** starts up on Oct. 2. Music from nine. Dining.



Bootsy Collins at Sounds of Brazil

Bradley's, 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—A neighborhood bar where, if your neighbors cooperate, you can hear the beautiful, singular sound of musicians thinking. The **barry harris** duo will be here Sept. 24-29; a trio consisting of saxophonist **craig handy,** pianist **james williams,** and bassist **ray drummond** comes in on Sept. 30; and a trio led by pianist **hank jones** starts up on Oct. 1. Music from nine-forty-five. Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The pastel uptown spa known as the Café Carlyle is currently home to **montgomery, plant & stritch.** Shows Tuesdays through Saturdays at nine-thirty and eleven-thirty. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in the Bemelmans' Bar, **ronny whyte** presides at the piano from nine-forty-five Tuesdays through Saturdays.

CBGB & OMFUG, 315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (982-4052)—In the late seventies and early eighties, this dark cave (graffiti-filled walls, a battered pool table, rest rooms for the intrepid only) was the hub of a thriving punk-music scene. While other clubs of the era have fizzled, CB's perseveres, and young hopefuls continue to fill the stage nightly. **bullet la volta** performs on Sept. 29. Music from nine-thirty Sundays through Thursdays, and from ten-thirty on Fridays and Saturdays.

Fat Tuesday's, 190 Third Ave., at 17th St. (533-7902)—If submarines had jazz clubs, they might look like this basement haunt, which is reached by passing through a tight corridor where you half expect to bump into Admiral Nimitz. This is not the place for those with a fear of intimacy: at the front tables you can go eye to eye with your favorite performers, and no matter where you're seated there's not much room to practice your T'ai Chi. The **joe henderson** quartet will be here through Sept. 30, and the **bill evans super band** begins work on Oct. 2. On Mondays, guitarist-inventor **les paul,** the Thomas Edison of reverb, leads a trio. Music from eight. Dining.

Fortune Garden Pavilion, 209 E. 49th St. (753-0101)—Chinese food served in a plush greenhouse setting. Through the glass roof, which supports a jungle of potted greenery, you can admire the fruits of the midtown real-estate boom. Violinist **richard carr** works with guitarist **howard alden** Sept. 25-30; Bill Mays reigns at the keyboard on Oct. 1; and pianist **joanne brackeen** flies solo beginning Oct. 2. Music from eight Mondays through Saturdays, and from seven on Sundays.

Kilimanjaro, 531 W. 19th St. (627-2333)—The northern branch of the popular Washington, D.C., night spot. As the name suggests, African music is the sine qua non, be it live or d.j.-spun. Calypso, reggae, and world-beat formats also turn up; in any case, the huge dance floor seldom lies fallow. The Jamaica-born, Bronx-bred reggae-rapper **shinehead** performs on Sept. 28. **aster aweke,** who has been called the Aretha Franklin of Ethiopia (she was raised in Addis Ababa, and now resides in D.C.), and whose first American album has just come out, is here on Sept. 29.

Knitting Factory, 47 E. Houston St., near Mulberry St. (219-3055)—A second-floor music-and-performance space, where people come to ponder the meaning of harmolodics and the post-ness of postmodernism. The room is run by two amiable young guys from Wisconsin, whose views on such things as cover charges are enlightened. The **klezmatics,** a local group that was formed in 1986, are here on Sept. 25, as part of a klezmer festival that runs through the 27th. The group, which has some excellent soloists, blends traditional Eastern European Yiddish music with modern idioms to produce work that's full of fervor, tension, and mysticism. The festival winds down with the New Klezmer Trio and Kapelye on Sept. 26, and the Klezmer Conservatory Band on Sept. 27. **they might be giants** perform on Oct. 2. Music after nine.

Lone Star Roadhouse, 240 W. 52nd St. (245-2950)—A cheery, climate-controlled restaurant and bar featuring a load of snazzy Gibson guitars, some Washington Square-style portraits of folks like Bo Diddley and Dr. John, and funky French fry–potato chip hybrids. Detroit ur-rocker **mitch ryder,** who had a series of party-music hits in the sixties and has been making "comebacks" ever since, will rock you silly on Oct. 1. Music after nine. Dining.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken. (1-201 798-4064)—A good sound system, cheap drinks, and a regular-guy atmosphere make this restaurant-bar, home of the Hoboken Sound and of the phrase "jangly guitars," a popular hangout for musicians and their followers. Manhattanites who stay through the second set will need all their Scout training to get home, but the aroma coming from the nearby Maxwell House factory (at least for a while longer) might give them a boost. **ultra vivid scene,** a Velvet Underground-influenced band that recently released its major-label début album, comes in on Sept. 28. **pylon,** R.E.M.'s lesser-known but equally regarded fellow-Athenians, perform on Oct. 3.

Michael's Pub, 211 E. 55th St. (758-2272)—Where you can always smell the stogies. **mel tormé,** whose well-preserved pop-jazz baritone can currently be heard here, was singing on the radio regularly by the age of four. Since then, he co-wrote that song about "chestnuts roasting on an open fire"; he made his movie début, along with Sinatra, in "Higher and Higher"; and he penned a biography of Judy Garland, as well as his own autobiography, 1988's "It Wasn't All Velvet." Tormé is currently offering his tribute to Buddy Rich, and the late drummer's band is backing him up. The shows are lively, but Tormé isn't onstage very long: he dashes in, sings some remember-this-ones, spins a few yarns, dishes out the requisite hokey patter, and dashes off again. And, because Tormé can always bring 'em in, the club is so packed with tables that patrons barely have room to swivel their heads. It gets harder and harder for clubgoers to live in the past. Closed Sundays.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza. (632-5000)—A moondust-in-your-hair cabaret where a club soda costs, well, a lot. There are plenty of niceties if you're so inclined: an ear-popping express elevator in which you can mingle with the famous; tables scattered with plastic diamonds and sapphires; and rest-room attendants who hover near the sink asking, "Is the water too warm?" **carol lawrence** and **larry kert** begin a three-week engagement on Sept. 25. Shows from nine. Dining. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

Red Blazer Too, 349 W. 46th St. (262-3112)—It may look like a plain old steakhouse, and the photos on the walls may look like Sardi's leftovers, but in the back room you'll find swing bands, Dixieland combos, and couples sprung from the legacy of Fred and Ginger. Mondays belong to Howie Wyeth's ragtime trio, Tuesdays to **vince giordano and the nighthawks,** and Wednesdays to Stan Rubin's band. Fridays are the province of Bob Leive and the Worcester Street Trolley Jazz Band, and Bob Cantwell and His Stompers claim Saturdays. **lynn oliver's** big band appears on Sept. 27. Music from five on Sundays, from eight-thirty Mondays through Thursdays, and from nine on Fridays and Saturdays.

Ritz, 254 W. 54th St. (541-8900)—The **sundays,** who will be here Sept. 26, are one of this year's nicest surprises: a shimmering British pop band whose début album, "Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic," is notable for Harriet Wheeler's winsome, fluttering voice and guitarist Dave Gavurin's Smiths-style strumming. **world party's** exceptional new album, "Goodbye Jumbo," wasn't much of a surprise—three years ago the band released a début nearly as good. Unfortunately, the sixties-inflected pop-rock outfit—led by former Waterboy Kurt Wallinger and appearing here on Sept. 27—gave a rather short and not-so-sweet show here this past spring. One can only hope that the intervening time on the road has given them the chance to get their act together. **youssou n'dour** performs on Sept. 28, and the **circle jerks**—an L.A. band whose fans are not shy about slam-dancing or stage-diving—come in on Sept. 29. Shows begin at nine Sundays through Thursdays, and at eleven Fridays and Saturdays.

Sounds of Brazil, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—This former luncheonette has a tropical motif—straw huts, bamboo, a fake palm tree, a mosaic of gourds—and one of the city's more international booking policies: Brazil, Africa, and the Caribbean are just a few of the places explored. **bootsy collins and his rubber band,** which started as a spinoff of Parliament-Funkadelic (Bootsy played bass and wrote songs for P-Funk) and was soon every bit as popular as its parent group, can be heard Sept. 26-27. Bootsy is an advocate of playful, flamboyant funk—in his early days he dressed like a Peter Max character, adopted alter egos like Bootzilla, and put out such well-received albums as "Ahh . . . the Name Is Bootsy, Baby!" Music from nine Tuesdays through Thursdays, and from ten Fridays and Saturdays. Dining. Closed Sundays.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—An itinerary stop for the international jazz groupies who, on any given night, can be seen roaming the streets of the

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NIGHT LIFE–Cont'd

Village. Up front, there's a glass-enclosed sidewalk café; in back is a larger room, with a pressed-tin ceiling, red brick, and more pinewood than a ski lodge. **MC COY TYNER,** a pianist who's known for giving listeners a lot of bang for their buck, plays in a trio through Sept. 30. Drummer and hard-bop kingpin **ART BLAKEY** brings his **JAZZ MESSENGERS** in for a two-week stay beginning Oct. 2. The electrified big band of the late Gil Evans, now under the direction of his son, the trumpeter Miles Evans, is in action on Mondays. Tee-off time is ten. Dining.

SWEETWATERS, 170 Amsterdam Ave., at 67th St. (873-4100)—Pink carnations on the tables, shrimp creole on the menu, a sunken dance floor with a "Saturday Night Fever" ball, and, occasionally, a house photographer who offers to take your picture. The stage, dominated by a white grand piano, is usually given over to soul and R. & B. acts. **MANNY OQUENDO Y LIBRE** take charge on Sept. 26. The **STYLISTICS,** who had a string of silky, Philadelphia-soul hits in the early seventies ("You Make Me Feel Brand New," for one), are on hand Sept. 28-29.

TRAMPS, 45 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—Located on a Chelsea block that's like an urban Disneyland (a pool hall, indoor miniature golf, a trendy all-night diner, Limelight around the corner), this roller-rink-size bar-and-restaurant is slicker than the original Tramps, but the emphasis on solid rock and blues remains. The slightly warped English popster **ROBYN HITCHCOCK** will be here Oct. 3-4.

VILLAGE VANGUARD, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—This windowless, pie-shaped basement has an illustrious history that embraces everyone from Judy Holliday to Lenny Bruce, from Pete Seeger and Leadbelly to Miles Davis and Sonny Rollins. The décor is homey and a little faded, like an atticful of memorabilia, but the music is anything but stale. Pianist **RANDY WESTON**—a musical descendant of Monk and Ellington, who injects his music with traditional African melodies and rhythms—leads a trio through Sept. 30. The **KENNY BARRON** quintet starts up on Oct. 2. Mondays are reserved for the late Mel Lewis's big band. Music after ten.

WETLANDS, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Two floors of no-nuke veggie entertainment and consciousness-raising. Listen to bands play in the Summer of Love-muralled back room; buy a tie-dyed T-shirt at the Volkswagen-bus curio shop; catch up on current events at the bulletin board and community calendar. Or, if you'd rather just be mellow, crash out in the basement hippie love pad. Sept. 27: **SPIN DOCTORS.** Sept. 28: **URBAN BLIGHT.** Sept. 29: **NEW RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE.**

WONDERLAND, 519 2nd Ave., at 29th St. (213-5098)—Formerly something of a dump and currently a powder-blue, nicely appointed jazz room. **ARNIE LAWRENCE** leads a quartet of piano, sax, bass, and drums here Sept. 28-29. Shows Wednesdays and Thursdays at nine and eleven, and Fridays and Saturdays at nine, eleven, and one. Dining.

EDGE OF NIGHT LIFE

THERE was hardly a mention of going to Mars. Roxy is fine on Saturday (for now), but what greedy desperation to think it could lure the fickle fellas back, as it tried to recently, for a second consecutive night with the retro thrill of the Village People. The Pyramid feels like a favorite old shetland that accidentally got tossed in the dryer. 20/20 is "The Twilight Zone" with a tambourine soundtrack and no commercial interruptions. There is a new winner in the Sunday Boy's Night Out Sweepstakes, and it has triumphed without multiple d.j.s., Varilites, conversation nooks, planetariums, porno films, drag vaudeville, or—even more shocking than George Michael's assumption that we can listen without prejudice—videos.

The Building (51 West 26th Street) is just what it says: a nondescript edifice with a great, cavernous, brick-walled interior, five stories high, whose basic, show-the-bare-bones design becomes novel by default. The space is more like the indestructible I-Beam in San Francisco than like any of its metropolitan competition. The Building is illuminated just enough so you can get through a crowd without a heat sensor, and it offers multiple balconies to simultaneously spy on and pose for friend, fantasy, and prey, with absolutely no alternative to sweating. And more unexpected than the stationary spotlights (there are only two halfhearted strobes to attack the retina) and lack of fog machines is how the proprietors, Carlos Almada and Howard Schaffer, have made the dance floor the center of attention.

Unless, of course, David is on a pedestal. The Building has, by acclamation, the best-built go-go "boys" in town, but David is in a crass by himself. Normally self-contained narcissists drool innocently. Guilt-ridden lovers are unable to look away. When David writhes, dance bunnies stumble and beautifully rehearsed come-ons fall to ruin; the dancer's pockets, meanwhile (if he still has them on), rack up the change. "A work of art," sighed one man to his feeling-less-significant-by-the-minute other. "How could you create a better one?" Michelangelo tried putting a David on a pedestal once, too, and his wasn't bad. But he couldn't dance a lick.

IN ANOTHER CATEGORY—PERFORMANCE ART, ETC.

NEXT WAVE FESTIVAL—This year's performing-arts showcase of music, dance, and theatre starts with Martha Clarke's latest work, "Endangered Species." The music is by Richard Peaslee and Stanley Walden, the text is by Walt Whitman, and the lighting is by Paul Gallo. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 1-718 636-4100. Oct. 2 at 7 and Oct. 3 at 8. Through Nov. 4. The festival continues through Dec. 9.)

KAREN FINLEY—Presenting a new work, "Imprudently Zealous," which is on a double bill with Laurie Carlos and Robbie McCauley's "Persimmon Peel." (Brooklyn Bridge Anchorage, Cadman Plaza West at Front St., Brooklyn. Sept. 28 at 7:30. For information about tickets, call 619-1955.)

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES—Michelangelo, Donatello, Raphael, and Leonardo in a rock-and-roll concert. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. Sept. 26-30 and Oct. 2-7. For information about show times and tickets, call 247-4777.)

"BUGS BUNNY ON BROADWAY"—An evening-length program of vintage rabbit cartoons, with live music by a forty-eight-piece orchestra. Opens on Oct. 3 at 8 and runs through Oct. 7. (Gershwin Theatre, 51st St. west of Broadway. 586-6510.)

P.S. 122—Sept. 27-30 at 8: Jennifer Miller and Circus Amok in "Spys R Us." . . . ¶ Sept. 27 and Sept. 29-30 at 9:30: Deborah Margolin in performances of her new work, "970-DEBB," which has something to do with answering machines. . . . ¶ Sept. 27-30 at 10: Reno in performances of "Out There Without a Prayer," a work in progress about censorship, world travel, and self-knowledge. (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

ART

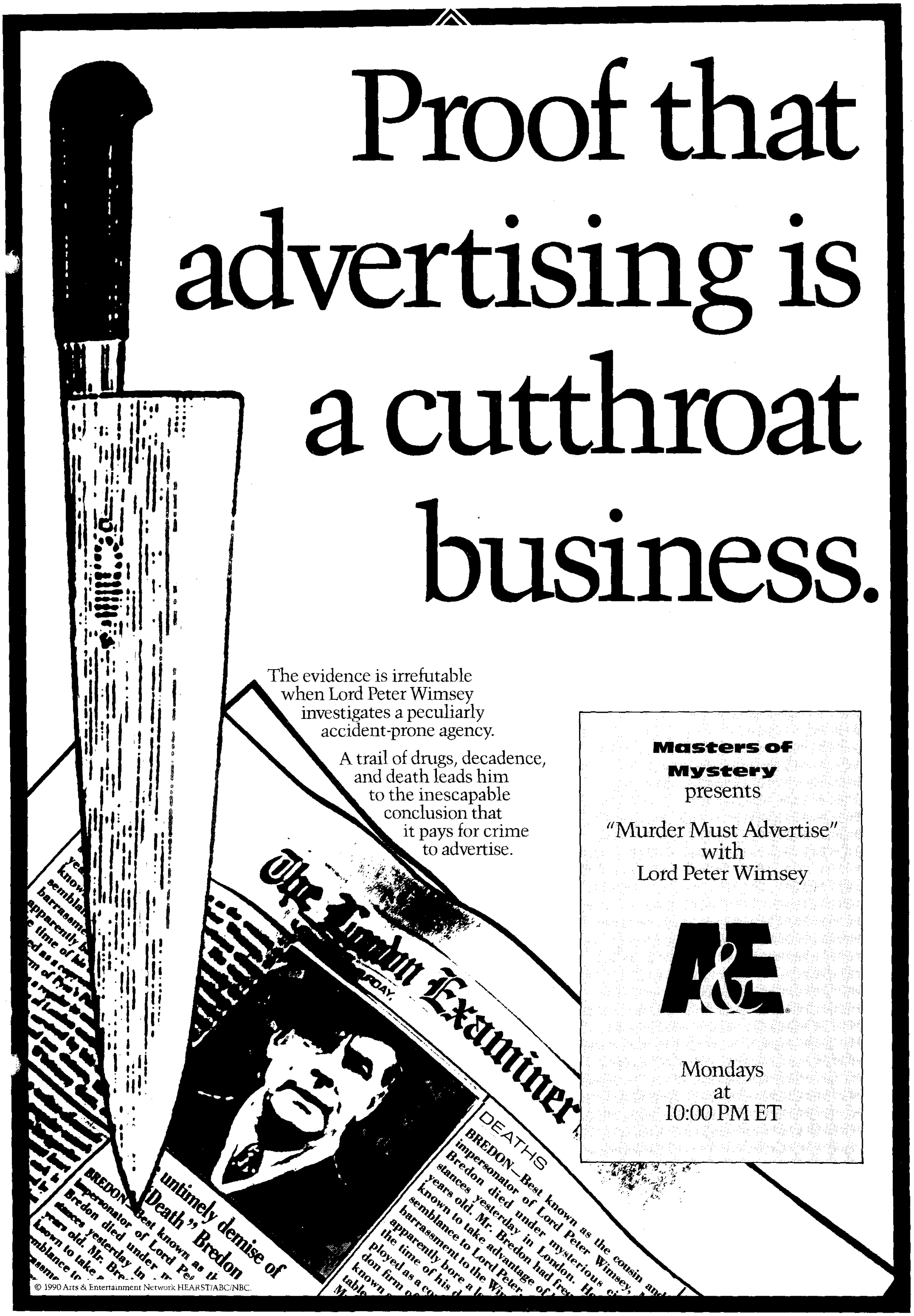
PAT STEIR's new paintings, all "Waterfalls," at the Robert Miller gallery (41 East 57th Street; through October 6) are triumphant in more than one sense. The works themselves are terrifically glamorous, for starters. Seen en masse, at night, and intensely lit at the crowded opening of this exhibition, they seemed to proclaim a gala event over which they presided, shimmering regally apart. With their lustrous black grounds and their cascades, rivulets, and spumes of white alternately silvered or ivoried, they paintings surge with movement and yet are utterly decorous. They also represent a breakthrough, formal as well as poetic, in Steir's twenty-five-year progress as a painter. Often in the past, Steir's work could be characterized, for better and worse, by its own condition of internal conflict. At times, a distinct and indeed ambitious painterliness seemed to be checked by a controlling, Conceptual eye. This was to an extent the case, for instance, with the seductive but schematic "Chrysanthemum Paintings" of the early eighties. In other instances, most notably the "Brueghel Series (A Vanitas of Style)," of 1982-84—a giant still-life composed of sixty-four gridded sections, each a separate art-historical allusion—Steir's art-historical relevance, along with her intellectual clout, could be resoundingly felt even as her technical limits were on display.

With the "Waterfalls," at last, Steir's aesthetic aims, her cerebral bent, and her considerable if not infallible skills are in cahoots and indissoluble. The "Waterfalls" are both literal (they *are* falls, of paint) and metaphorical; simultaneously realist and abstract; and at once aleatory, with their drips and splashes, and methodologically driven. Furthermore, as the art historian Holland Cotter puts it in a clear essay for the show, they "seem to offer a paradigm of Expressionism-after-angst, in which 'masculine' strength and 'feminine' delicacy are present but unconflicted, in which turbulence and serenity balance out, in which paint is psychic signature and ornament, in which erotic energy is aroused and resolved, just as these vertical columns dissolve into painterly mist." According to Cotter, Steir's "Expressionism-after-angst" coincides with many principles of traditional Chinese painting—"non-hierarchical, centerless" composition, for example.

There is one last sense of triumph to this smoothie of an exhibition—that of the artist's "arrival" at mid-career. Steir appears to have a slyly humorous sense of this belated, long-awaited turn of events, as one slightly yellowed painting, titled "Waterfall for a Mature Bride," attests.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—"Wright of Derby" (1734-97): This upright Midlands product of eighteenth-century empiricism—an artist who never quite managed to succeed Gainsborough as star society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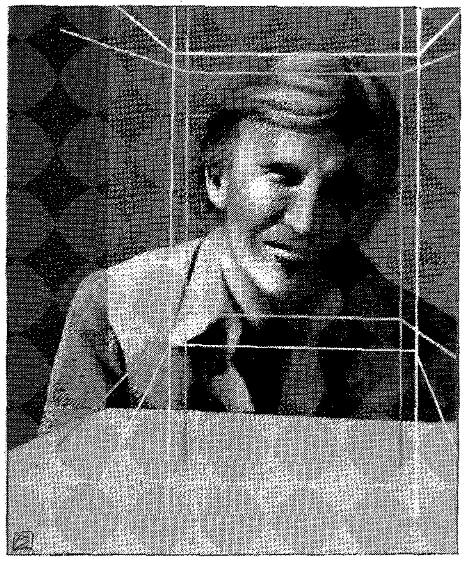

Patrick Ireland at Cowles

portraitist of Bath—is probably best known for five often reproduced paintings, all included here. Two of these, including the epochal "An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump," have scientific themes and prescient, rather cinematic compositions that may remind the viewer of the very compelling, if rather sombre, "Masterpiece Theatre" style. A third painting, the landscape "Awkwright's Cotton Mills, by Night," is often cited as a sort of dawn-of-the-Industrial-Revolution-in-a-nutshell, in part because the factories' illuminated windows indicate a night shift and, by extension, all the horrors that would prompt the great Victorian Reform Acts. A fourth work, "The Widow of an Indian Chief Watching the Arms of Her Deceased Husband," is a ne plus ultra of European period exoticism concerning the Americas. And the last, a portrait of one Brooke Boothby, dated 1781, is a brilliant study of cultivated English lassitude, as well as an early blossoming of the melancholy *fleurs* that would be so carefully plucked and arranged during the following century. The exhibition, however, includes a great deal more. There are dozens of portraits and many landscapes featuring rainbows, fireworks, and other symptoms of the picturesque being popularized again today. The show is a lot of fun, and a must for Anglophiles and history buffs. But the paintings tend to elicit more bookish responses than visual ones, as exemplified in several horrifically prosaic wall labels in the first two galleries—post-Marxism for morons. . . . ¶ Nineteen chalk-and-graphite drawings by John Singleton Copley (1738-1815). They are mostly studies for his enormous paintings, such as "The Ascension," "Siege of Gibraltar," and his portrait of John Adams. . . . ¶ "Glories of the Past" is an exhibition of bronze and marble sculptures, vases, and jewelry made between 5000 B.C. and A.D. 800 that focusses on works from the Mediterranean and the Near East. . . . ¶ An exhibition of eighteenth-century Italian drawings, including works by Francesco Guardi, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, and others. . . . **NOTE:** The museum's roof garden is open (when the weather is fine), with a new lineup of twentieth-century sculptures and a sixty-five-foot shade-providing pergola. Through Oct. 28. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 W. 53rd St.—"First Light," a suite of twenty black-and-white etchings by James Turrell. Through Nov. 13. . . . ¶ "Diagramming Microchips," a small exhibition of the large, colorful, computer-generated diagrams used to design microchips, is an attempt to bridge the gulf between high art and everyday objects that dominates our visual perception. Perhaps this show signals a return to the broader type of exhibition that once characterized this institution. Unfortunately, the microchip diagrams are displayed as if they were paintings, and as such they beg comparison with everything from Mondrian's "Broadway Boogie-Woogie" to pattern painting. Some of the colorful, densely packed circuitry contains signatures or logos of the chips' designers—computer-nerd graffiti. Through Oct. 30. (Open daily, except Wednesdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—The museum is closed for renovation until autumn, 1991.

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—A group of ten grisaille drawings by Ed Ruscha called "Some Los Angeles Apartments," made in 1965 in conjunction with the photography book of the same name. Through Oct. 14. . . . ¶ An exhibition of ninety-five paintings, constructions, and drawings by Burgoyne Diller (1906-65). (A show of drawings is at Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St.) (Open Tuesdays, 1 to 8, with no admission charge after 6; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 5; Sundays, noon to 6.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM, Eastern Parkway—An exhibition of sixty paintings by Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847-1917). . . . ¶ "Milton Avery in Black and White" is a display of eighty drawings in pencil, ink, and crayon made by Avery between 1929 and 1959. Starts Sept. 27. . . . ¶ "Caribbean Festival Arts" presents costumes, masks, videotapes, music, and photographs related to the traditional celebrations of Jonkonnu, Carnival, and the Islamic Hosay. The thirty-six costume ensembles include materials such as mirrors, feathers, sequins, and beads, and range from human scale to sixteen feet tall. Through Nov. 5. . . . ¶ A display of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings and works on paper titled "Monet and His Contemporaries." Included are five works by Monet, and others by Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, van Gogh, and Picasso. . . . ¶ A site-specific installation by Joseph Kosuth will be in the museum's lobby. Starts Sept. 27. (Open daily, except Tuesdays, 10 to 5.)

ASIA SOCIETY, Park Ave. at 70th St.—"Court Arts of Indonesia" establishes a Javanese *kraton*, or court, to display more than a hundred and fifty works of art from the eighth century to the twentieth. Included are elaborate shadow puppets, a jewelled *rebab* (a stringed instrument) from Bali, and ritual marriage figures. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6; Sundays, noon to 5.)

FRICK COLLECTION, 1 E. 70th St.—Seventy-eight drawings and watercolors by the German artist Adolph Menzel (1815-1905). Through Nov. 18. (Open daily, except Mondays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

JEWISH MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St.—"A Day in the Warsaw Ghetto." Eighty-five photographs taken in September, 1941, by Heinz Jöst, who was a member of the German Army at the time. Through Nov. 1. . . . ¶ "Why I Got Into TV and Other Stories," a "mid-career" retrospective of Ilene Segalove's taped stories, radio programs, and photographic collages. Through Nov. 1. . . . ¶ A show of ten paintings and drawings, and a contemporary interpretation of a sukkah, or improvised shelter, by the artist Eli Content. Through Nov. 1. (Open Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, noon to 5; Tuesdays, noon to 8, with no admission charge from 5 to 8; Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MORGAN LIBRARY, 29 E. 36th St.—"Treasures of Eton College Library," a collection of more than two hundred manuscripts, rare books, and drawings. Included are the first edition of Thomas Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" and the manuscript of "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." Starts Sept. 26. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10:30 to 5; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"Women in Mexico" presents more than a hundred paintings, drawings, collages, and photographs by twenty-two Mexican women artists. Starts Sept. 28. . . . ¶ A retrospective featuring fifty-nine works by Gari Melchers (1860-1932). Included are portraits, religious scenes, landscapes, and nudes. Through Nov. 4. (Open Tuesdays, noon to 8, with no admission charge from 5 to 8; Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5.)

THE NEW MUSEUM, 583 Broadway—"From Receiver to Remote Control" explores the impact of the television set on twentieth-century America. On display are more than a hundred old and new sets, along with VCRs and other TV paraphernalia. Viewers even have a chance to participate in some of the installations (don't touch that dial!). Through Nov. 25. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, noon to 8.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 170 Central Park W., at 77th St.—An exhibition that reunites more than sixty of the American paintings that were displayed at the 1889 World's Fair, in Paris. Included are works by John Singer Sargent, Theodore Robinson, William Merritt Chase, and James McNeill Whistler. Through Nov. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

QUEENS MUSEUM, Flushing Meadow Park—"Keith Haring: Future Primeval." More than seventy paintings, sculptures, and drawings by Haring (1958-90). Through Nov. 25. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5:30.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM, 144 W. 125th St.—"Home: Contemporary Urban Images by Black Photographers." More than ninety works by eleven photographers. . . . ¶ Eighty contemporary works, including paintings, sculptures, photographs, musical instruments, and videotapes, make up "The Blue Aesthetic," an exhibition that explores the impact of African-American culture on twentieth-century art. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 1 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

WILLEM DE KOONING—The earliest work in this brisk, lucid show is titled "Glazier" (1940), and is one of the artist's psychologically compelling but unsung portraits of men. It was made during the peak of his friendship with Arshile Gorky, whose febrile, introspective influence is in this case visible. De Kooning's wild fifties women are of course

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GONE FISHING

The pier that juts into the Harlem River at 107th Street will soon become the only pier in Manhattan on which the public is welcome, even encouraged, to frolic at any hour. Sheltered by a long, low steel canopy, it was built in the nineteen-thirties as a dock for local factories; in the sixties and seventies it evolved into a favored place for neighborhood people to fish or spoon. But for the past three years it has been closed while the city has spent three million dollars shoring up its pilings and curing its rust problems. When the pier reopens this fall, it will not look greatly changed; the restoration architects, Giorgio Cavaglieri and Joseph Sultan, repaired rather than redesigned the canopy's flat roof and crisscross railings and the pier's thick timber trim. The color scheme, however, is new—yellow for the stone benches that surround the canopy, gray and black for the steel beams and columns—as is the cement-and-marble-chip floor, on which gray, black, and white stripes intersect at odd angles. Andrea Blum, the artist who created these patterns, calls them "cameos of the urban grid," and they look like Mondrians hung askew. Equally eye-catching here is the view: the peaceful, murky water, the forested edge of Ward's Island, the lacy gray tips of the Triborough Bridge.

The Parks Department says it plans to allow "anything reasonable" to occur on the pier, from concerts and floating-cinema screenings to private parties and visits from the sloop Clearwater. And there will, of course, be fishing—the Harlem River may not be Montauk Point, but a half-dozen blue crabs or striped bass are not an impossible day's catch.

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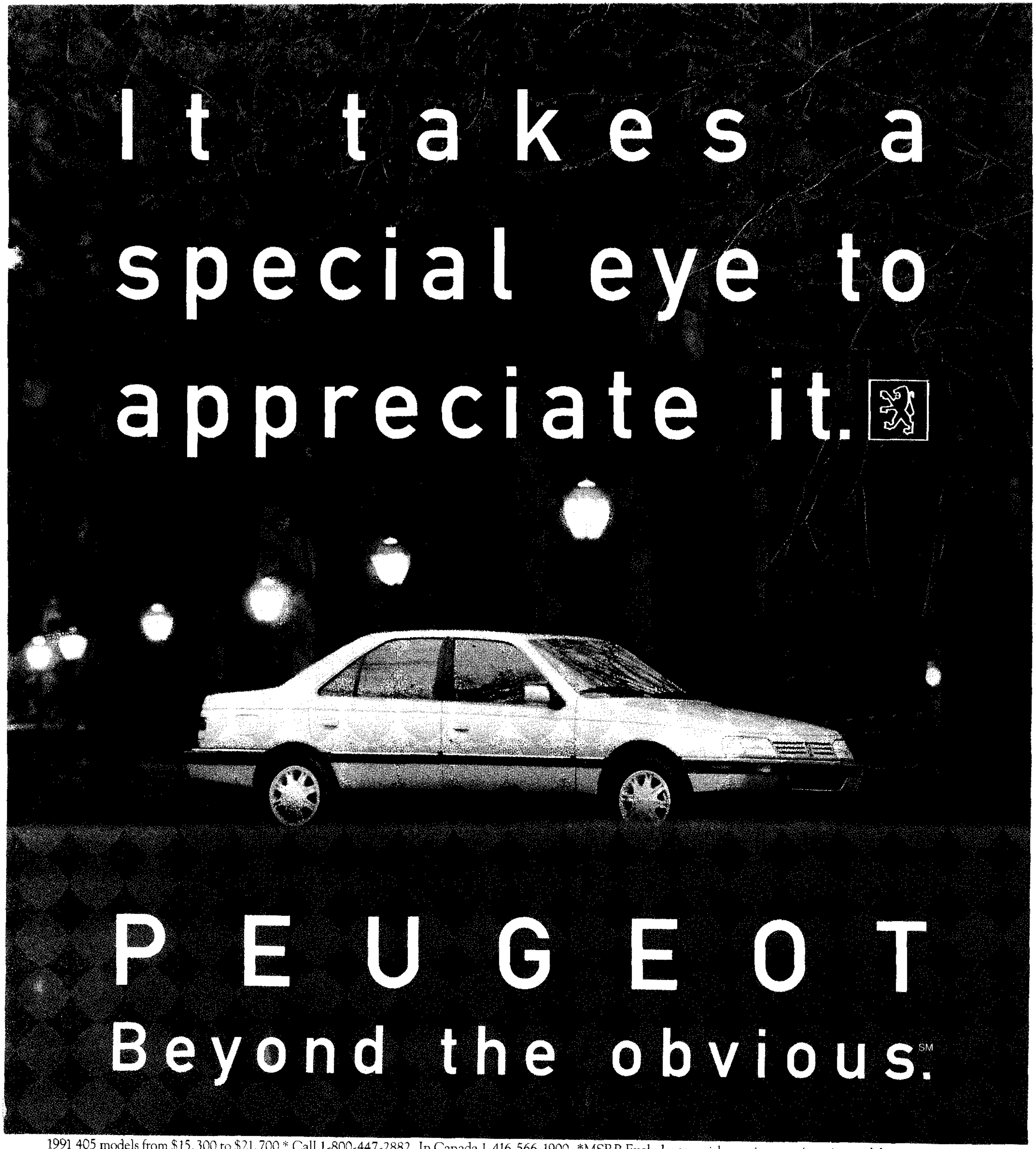

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represented, too. There is a carnivalesque "Marilyn Monroe" (1954) and MOMA's epochal "Woman II" (1952), in addition to works on paper. Most thrilling, however, are two paintings from 1984. In these technically incomprehensible canvases, pure flame-licks of primary color seem to have soared skyward into a sun-drenched cloud chariot of white. It's like Mondrian by Tiepolo—experience this buggy ride and die! Through Oct. 13. (Salander O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. Open Mondays.)

Herbert Ferber—Recent paintings and sculptures. *The sculptures, in which a raw, industrial quality is balanced against biomorphic lines, are very accomplished three-dimensional sketches.* The paintings, under the group title "Illusions," are impersonal and uninteresting. Their more animated passages, within chromatically vague, stippled grounds, suggest the word "accents." Through Oct. 4. (Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St.)

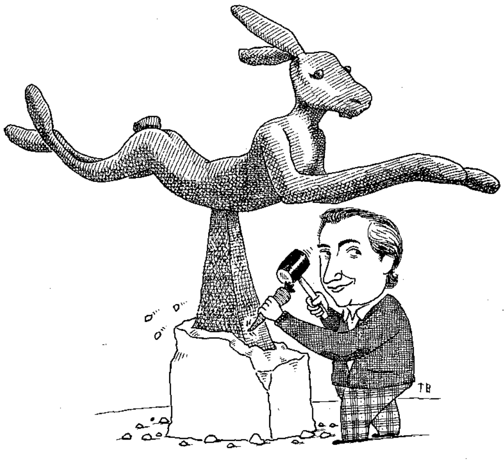
David Robilliard (1952-88)—Robilliard was one of the freshest talents to emerge from London in the late eighties. Primarily a poet, he also created lean paintings, both sly and naïve, of his poems about youth and beauty, their power and their fragility. The works on view here have a childlike directness and a haunting clarity. Although his work had not fully evolved by the time of his death, it is nonetheless mature and strong. When you read "Everybody's eyes strained not to look, but like the tide her pull could not be denied" in one of Robilliard's paintings, you are encountering an artist who understood the properties of power and attraction. Through Oct. 6. (Hirschl & Adler Modern, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. Open Mondays.)

Short List—**ROBERT BIRMELIN,** Bernard, 33 E. 74th St. (through Oct. 6); **JÖRG IMMENDORFF,** Werner, 21 E. 67th St. (open Mondays, through Sept. 29); **FRANK STELLA,** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. (through Oct. 20).

GALLERIES—57th STREET AREA

Barry Flanagan—An extraordinarily buoyant, upbeat show by an important British sculptor whose work is infrequently exhibited here, apart from the permanent installation of one of his leaping hares in the sidewalk atrium of the Equitable Center. Rabbits are also the subject of this exhibition—huge bronze statues of them, rendered singly and in pairs, as figures leaping, boxing, and enlivening such decorative-arts conventions as the ball-and-claw motif of Empire furniture. For Flanagan, the European hare is at once an alter ego and a historical marker, tracing precedents from the Northern Renaissance, with artists such as Dürer and Hoffmann, all the *way to the present. These bunnies look both* feral and goofy. They suggest the Pink Panther as well as assorted tricksterish thugs. They somehow retain a weird, animal "otherness" even as they conform to the human condition. And although they are monumental bronzes, these sculptures have a technically amazing bounce. Through Oct. 13. (Pace, 32 E. 57th St.)

Douglas Huebler / Michael Gonzalez—A show of one of the last first-generation Conceptualists to be rediscovered by an art world perhaps more comfortable with the new, improved version. Huebler's is a zany mind. Most of the works on display, from 1968 to the present, document the artist taking exceedingly logical procedures and trying to carry them out (or suggesting that he will carry them out), despite the fact that, in some cases, he knows it would be impossible to do so. The activities thus become a theatre of the absurd, and they embody a spirit of protest without ever being so crude as to shed, as some of the recent works are aptly titled, "Crocodile Tears." / A handsome display of sculptures and wall pieces made of shiny metal machine parts, architects' erasers, and pills. Through Oct. 6. (Holly Solomon, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Open Mondays.)



Barry Flanagan

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30	1	2	3			

Beverly Pepper / Burgoyne Diller (1906-65)—A surprisingly strong show of recent work by this established, and rather conventional, sculptor—low reliefs in sometimes beautifully patinated bronze, and freestanding, totemlike sentinels and columns. Pepper conveys the sensuality of brushwork in the reliefs and, in the vertical pieces, suggests the faintly comic, predatory sense of the human scale that some viewers may associate with Surrealism and the sculptures of Max Ernst. / A selection of thirty abstract drawings made between 1945 to 1961 that augments the Diller retrospective at the Whitney, revealing to full advantage this neo-plasticist's subtle, detailed, and transcendent touch. Both shows through Oct. 6. (Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St.)

Short List—**ROBERT ARNESON** and **JOAN BROWN,** Frumkin-Adams, 50 W. 57th St. (through Oct. 13); **KATHERINE BOWLING,** Blum Helman, 20 W. 57th St. (through Oct. 20); **SQUEAK CARNWATH,** Shea & Beker, 20 W. 57th St. (through Oct. 13); **JOANNE CARSON** and **JAN HOLCOMB,** Ruth Siegel, 24 W. 57th St. (through Oct. 6); **GIORGIO CAVALLON,** McCoy, 41 E. 57th St. (through Oct. 27); **JAMES COOK,** Tatistcheff, 50 W. 57th St. (through Oct. 10); **LOVIS CORINTH,** Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. (through Nov. 3); **BEATRICE ERICSON,** Gallery 84, 50 W. 57th St. (through Oct. 6); **HARRY HOLTZMAN,** Washburn, 41 E. 57th St. (through Oct. 27); **MICHAEL KESSLER,** Tilton, 24 W. 57th St. (through Sept. 29); **FERRAN GARCÍA SEVILLA,** Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. (through Oct. 6); **BONNIE SKLARSKI,** Schoelkopf, 50 W. 57th St. (through Oct. 10); **STEPHEN TANIS,** French, 41 W. 57th St. (open Mondays, through Sept. 29); **JOHN WILDE,** Schmidt Bingham, 41 W. 57th St. (open Mondays, through Sept. 29).

GALLERIES—SoHo

Lynda Benglis—Recent large polished-aluminum arrangements of fancifully knotted Fortuny pleats that celebrate a feminine sensibility but seem choked by their own endlessly reworked elegance. Through Sept. 29. (Cooper, 155 Wooster St.)

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds—A Native American artist who appropriates a Western aesthetic to examine racism in America in a most eloquent way. His primary vehicle is words, either starkly typeset on posters and billboards or drawn in scratchy pastel letters on paper. His most affecting pieces are the public works, represented here by photographs and a few leftover components. Even when Heap of Birds is at his angriest—as in a public work he made in response to a Canadian government policy whereby Indian women married to white men can no longer be recognized as Indians—the work is poetic and dignified. Through Oct. 6. (Exit Art, 578 Broadway.)

Lisa Hein / Ana Mendieta (1948-85)—Recent sculptures that suggest ambitious motives and dry wit. A large structure on the gallery's first floor consists of a wood-and-fibreglass basin, and a jutting steel tower with a brimming plastic back-yard kiddie pool on top. In a wonderfully cavalier use of prime gallery space, two very long, thin pipes extend from this exurban folly all the way to the back of the room, where we find a small, sinister-looking electric water pump: the source. Through Oct. 6. / An exhibition, on the third floor, of Mendieta's 1976 installation "Nanigo Burial." The piece consists of an ambiguous outline on the floor—almost but not quite a cruciform, almost but not quite the shape of a fallen body as it might be drawn, on site, by the police. This disturbing silhouette is ringed by a low forest of black candles that evoke a witches' Sabbath or the rites of the Caribbean cult known as Santeria. It is a grandly beautiful work. Also eerie, to say the least. Through Oct. 27. (Hearn, 39 Wooster St.)

Ralph Humphrey (1932-90)—It is somewhat baffling that these very beautiful "Frame Paintings" of 1964-65 are rarely mentioned alongside the work of Jo Baer, Robert Ryman, and Agnes Martin, who have got the lion's share of credit for dealing with similar ideas at the same time. Humphrey's works are in grayed colors, and while their imagery clearly refers to the structure of painting, their gestures suggest that they are all about light and a personal experience of environment. Through Oct. 6. (Boone, 417 West Broadway.)

Adrian Piper—Although this African-American artist often tackles issues of racism head-on with great style, here her deadpan humor falls flat. The centerpiece of this all-too-generic installation of photographs and sculptural booths is a recording of the artist playing the part of an ostensibly liberal white woman—the surrogate art viewer—wandering through the exhibition and becoming increasingly offended by the work's heavy-handedness. The problem is that the irony—and the confrontation, for that matter—never really kicks in, and the piece ends up sounding simply pretentious. Through Sept. 29. (Weber, 142 Greene St.)

Pruitt/Early—In case you've missed the point of this young duo's boy's-room aesthetic, in case you've failed to understand their attitude toward the piles of beer cans, flame decals, wood cutouts of big-breasted teens, and shrink-wrapped paintings of Harley Davidson crests and other decals on tie-dyed and camouflage fabric—all part of their show here—take a look at their homemade music videos. Made in the teen-clothing department at Macy's, each video features a friend or an art luminary singing or lip-synching a favorite Top Forty hit. The project is the most glorious piece of humanizing camp to come down the pike in some time. Through Oct. 6. (303 Gallery, 89 Greene St.)

Wade Saunders—This accomplished sculptor discovered India and overdid it. Some of his new stone sculptures, which were executed there, have Hindu-derived forms and are quite nicely massed. But most are draped with bits of silk and make overly literal allusions to the Asian practice of dressing sculptures of the deities. Through Oct. 6. (Brown, 560 Broadway.)

Robin Winters—It's always a joy to see how Winters has chosen to work his magic, skillfully riding the edge between mastery and subversiveness. His current material is sculptures of heads: goofy behatted ones made of crystal; craggy bronze ones, fuzzed like Rodin waxes, some topped by devil horns or figurative objects; and shelves of little glazed clay ones, which are the crudest and possibly the most absorbing. And a mound of yellow ceramic crowns, which look a lot like the SAMO crown Jean-Michel Basquiat used to draw, may well be a requiem for all the fallen graffiti kings, or for imperiousness in general. Through Oct. 3. (Alexander, 59 Wooster St.)

"Queer"—Since Congress made it impossible for the N.E.A. to fund art that could be seen as erotic to a gay person, the need to assert sexual identity in art has quite naturally intensified. This is a large, messy group show of works by gay artists. It's surprisingly conservative in form—primarily easel painting and collage. Many of the pieces are erotic, and many are not, but they all cohabit quite comfortably. There are some exceptions to the mostly art-school fare here, including David Wojnarowicz's notebook of some beautiful, murky watercolors depicting sex in a porn theatre; Craig Coleman's assault on middle-class taste that consists of a dime-store painting of a rocky coast to which the artist has added cartoonish figures with erections; and the late David Robilliard's effortlessly elegant drawing of a fully clothed young man, a work that is quite homoerotic and thus theoretically "unfundable," even though if it were a movie it would most certainly be rated G. Through Sept. 29. (Wessel O'Connor, 580 Broadway.)

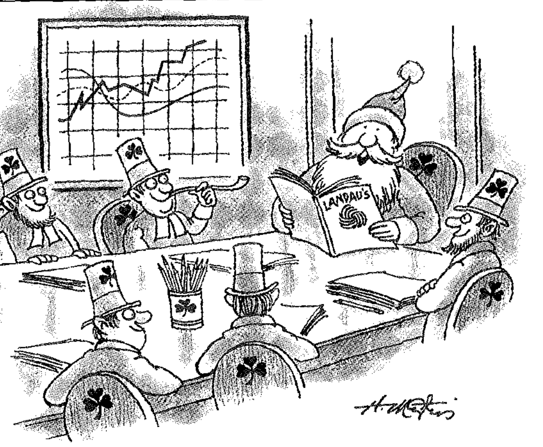
SHORT LIST—**NORMAN BARR** and **JULES HALFANT,** Teller, 568 Broadway (through Oct. 6); **ROBERT BARRY,** Castelli, 420 West Broadway (through Oct. 13); **JEFFREY BROSK,** Rosenberg, 115 Wooster St. (through Oct. 20); **SAINT CLAIR CEMIN,** Audiello and Sperone Westwater, both at 142 Greene St. (through Oct. 13); **ERIC DE LA COVA** and **MARTIN WONG,** Plumb, 81 Greene St. (through Oct. 13); **NANCY DWYER,** Baer, 476 Broome St. (through Oct. 20); **ROBERT ENGEL,** Donahue, 560 Broadway (through Oct. 6); **RAFAEL FERRER,** Hoffman, 429 West Broadway (through Oct. 3); **DICK HIGGINS,** Harvey, 537 Broadway (through Oct. 20); **PATRICK IRELAND,** Cowles, 420 West Broadway (through Oct. 6); **ANISH KAPOOR,** Gladstone, 99 Greene St. (through Oct. 6); **JAMES LITTLE,** Kelly, 591 Broadway (through Oct. 2); **IRENA MARTENS** and **SALLY ECKOFF,** Perlow, 560 Broadway (through Sept. 29); **ANDREW MASULLO,** Fiction-Nonfiction, 21 Mercer St. (through Oct. 6); **KATHLEEN MC CARTHY,** Gracie Mansion Gallery, 532 Broadway (through Oct. 6); **PIETER LAURENS MOL,** Louver, 130 Prince St. (through Oct. 6); **PETER NADIN,** Gorney, 100 Greene St. (through Oct. 13); **RICHARD NONAS,** Burgin, 130 Prince St. (through Oct. 20); **CLIFFTON PEACOCK,** Germans van Eck, 420 West Broadway (through Oct. 13); **JUDY PFAFF,** Protetch, 560 Broadway (through Oct. 27); **SAL SCARPITTA,** Greenberg Wilson, 560 Broadway (through Oct. 20); **MICHAEL SCOTT,** Shafrazi, 163 Mercer St. (through Oct. 20); **ROBERT STACKHOUSE,** Dolan Maxwell, 154 Wooster St. (through Oct. 6); **MASAMI TERAOKA,** Auchincloss, 558 Broadway (through Oct. 13); **EUGENE VON BRUENCHENHEIN,** Thorp, 103 Prince St. (through Oct. 13); **MARGARET WHARTON,** Kind, 136 Greene St. (through Oct. 17); **DAVID WINTER,** Toll, 146 Greene St. (through Sept. 29).

OTHER GALLERIES

ARTHUR GETZ—An exhibition of forty-seven sketches and original paintings for *New Yorker* covers. Through Oct. 13. (Illustration House, 96 Spring St.)

DEBORAH KASS—In this gutsy show of painted parodies and pastiched appropriations, Kass takes on some big boys, at times heavy-handedly. Kass can "do" just about any style. Familiar cartoon characters, Pollock drips, and the signature flourishes of many a famous artist have turned up in her work before. Now, however, they have been joined by more sexually loaded images lifted from Jasper Johns (the fetishistic lips behind eyeglasses, from the "Critic Sees" series) and, more pointedly still, from David Salle, who is Kass's exact contemporary. In appropriating Salle's image of a straddling girl, Kass seems to think she's undermining what she believes to be a misogynistic image. More likely, she is raising its alleged perpetrator to the level of Pollock and Johns—which would certainly please Salle no end. Kass is at her best when her subjects are more personal and her intentions a bit less easy to decode. There's an evocative and rather sweet-natured painting, for instance, that includes a broad passage of landscape, a swath of glossy abstraction, and the picture of an old-fashioned little girl discussing something or other with Frankenstein's monster. There's also a funny, Pop-ish paean to lesbianism that includes two small grisaille portraits of Toklas and Stein—one on each side, in the medieval "donor" positions—with two Vargas-y girls making out in between. Through Sept. 29. . . . ¶ Also at this gallery: "Al Ordover, Portrait of a Sixties Collector." There's only one bona-fide art work here, a fine portrait of the collector and his wife by Richard Artschwager. But the rest of the show—a scrapbook of the bills of sale for the works Ordover acquired in the sixties—is no less electrifying and enlightening. Not only do we follow Ordover from M-G-M to ABC, from the Upper West Side to New Jersey to a place perhaps aptly named Lake Success, but we discover just how affordable art once was. Think about this: the sales tax on Ordover's first Lichtenstein, a fine diptych from 1961 that is no doubt worth millions today, was $10.50. Through Sept. 29. (Watson, 241 Lafeyette St.)

(*Advertisement*)



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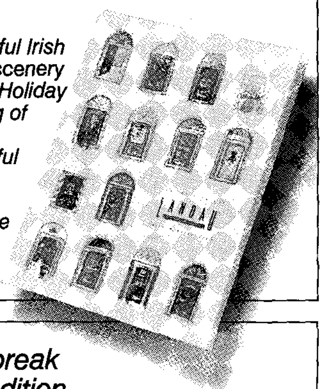

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76

PHOTOGRAPHY

METRO PICTURES has chosen three heavy hitters—Louise Lawler, Cindy Sherman, and Laurie Simmons—to open the new season (150 Greene Street; through October 6). This is a group show with a reason for being: there are genuine connections among these artists. That doesn't mean there aren't significant differences among them, too—and, in fact, seeing them together here makes those differences particularly vivid.

Observers have pointed out again and again how all three of these artists appropriate their material. Rarely, however, are their works discussed in terms of their level of invention. That is what is so compelling about this exhibition—it shows us how much difference invention can make. Sherman's pieces are very strong—they are full of her mastery over the Old Masters, but they also display her wit and imagination. Simmons' work is also on a high: her plays on scale, her sense of lighting, and her twist on surrealism make for pieces with a lot of power. Lawler, however, is disappointing; in the company of her fellow-parasites she seems oppressively judgmental. This judgmentalism is less obvious in the pieces that appropriate her colleague Sherman than in the stiffer still-lifes, such as "Does It Matter Who Owns It?," where it is right on the surface. The intrinsic self-righteousness of Lawler's work illustrates that taking without giving is not enough.

SANDY SKOGLUND—This artist's installations are a balancing act between kookiness and incredible things made somehow plausible—*she isn't afraid of going all the way with an* idea. In her newest piece, "The Green House," the Borden gallery's door, floor, and walls are covered with green straw, as are the furniture and objects that fill the room. Practically the only things that aren't green are twenty-two sculptures of dogs—and they're purple. Photography crops up here in several ways. All around the room are little green straw-covered frames of the type one usually fills with family pictures. And in the back of the installation is the climax of the piece—a large photograph of a green room that's almost identical to its re-creation in this gallery. Through Sept. 29. (560 Broadway.)

SHORT LIST—**JOHN BALDESSARI**, Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway (through Oct. 13); **LARRY CLARK**, Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St. (through Oct. 13); **MICHAEL EASTMAN**, Witkin, 415 West Broadway (opens at noon on Saturdays, through Oct. 20); **EVERGON**, Shainman, 560 Broadway (through Oct. 6); **CANDIDA HÖFER**, Klagsbrun, 51 Greene St. (through Oct. 6); **MARK KLETT** and **NAN GOLDIN**, Pace-MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. (through Oct. 20); **KEN LUM**, Rosen, 130 Prince St. (through Oct. 13); **JOEL MEYEROWITZ**, Danziger, 415 West Broadway *(through Oct. 13)*; **RYUJI MIYAMOTO** and **HIROSHI OSAKA**, Lowinsky, 584 Broadway (through Oct. 31); **STEPHEN JOHN PHILLIPS**, Fendrick, 568 Broadway, entrance on Prince St. (through Sept. 29); **SYLVIA PLACHY**, Burden, 20 E. 23rd St. (opens at noon, through Oct. 27); **MAN RAY**, International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. (daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8; through Nov. 25); **RICHARD ROSS**, Lieberman & Saul, 155 Spring St. (opens at noon on Saturdays, through Oct. 6); **ROCKY SCHENCK**, Cugliani, 508 Greenwich St., at Spring St. (through Sept. 28); **KENNETH SNELSON** and **NICHOLAS NIXON**, Zabriskie, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. (open Mondays, through Oct. 6); **THOMAS STRUTH**, Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. (through Oct. 13); **JOSEF SUDEK**, Photofind, 138 Spring St. (through Oct. 20); **SUSAN UNTERBERG**, Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. (through Oct. 13).

MUSIC

SO Carlos Kleiber is back at the Met! At the time of this writing, he was reported to be in town, happy, and working away on preparations for his seven performances of "Der Rosenkavalier," beginning on September 25. This is the elusive and excitable German-born maestro's fourth opera at the house in three years, which makes him something of a regular—a dazzling thought, given the company's reputation for being unable to lure conductors of stature. The usual reason given for the absence of celebrated leaders on the podium is their unwillingness to take second helpings after James Levine, the artistic director. "Tell me," Erich Leinsdorf once asked in his colorful way, "after someone has sucked all the raisins out of the cake, who will want the body of the cake?" The suggestion is sometimes made that Mr. Levine takes the most important projects for himself (what else, we can't help wondering, ought an artistic director do?) and distributes the orchestral players, rehearsal time, and casts in a way not calculated to show guest conductors to advantage. Nothing remotely of the kind can be asserted in this instance; Mr. Levine not only gathered a well-regarded ensemble for "Rosenkavalier" but put his own name down for the performances while negotiations with Mr. Kleiber were undertaken, and stood by to conduct them himself if the negotiations proved unsuccessful. This is what is called being a trouper. Mr. Levine could well be excused for feeling envious of Mr. Kleiber, but he seems to feel the opposite.

And why is there so much excitement over the conductor's return? No one who heard his "Bohème," "Traviata," or "Otello" will wonder; the man has a magic touch. With no more than an ordinary amount of rehearsal (but, we are told, with far more than ordinary care for marking the orchestra's music with his precise intentions), he has achieved a kind of transparency, beauty of sound, vitality, and naturalness of movement that no one else seems to quite reach. Each performance we have heard has had at least two or three breathtaking moments; however unsatisfactory some of the singing might have been, there was music-making of an order that stands out even among excellences. Andrew Porter wrote last March in this magazine that "hearing him is a joy of the season"; enough said.

(The box-office number for the Metropolitan Opera House is 362-6000; for Avery Fisher Hall 874-2424; for Carnegie Hall 247-7800; for Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St., 840-2824; and for the 92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St., 415-5440.)

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA—The opening performances of the season, which will run through April 20. **LA BOHÈME**, with Mirella Freni, Barbara Daniels, Placido Domingo, Brian Schexnayder, Richard Cowan (début), Julien Robbins, Renato Capecchi, Meredith Derr, Paul De Paola, and Herman Marcus; conducted by Christian Badea. (Sept. 24 at 7, and Sept. 28 and Oct. 2 at 8.) . . . **DER ROSENKAVALIER**, with Felicity Lott, Anne Sofie von Otter, Barbara Bonney, and Aage Haugland; Carlos Kleiber. (Sept. 25 and *Sept. 29 at 7:30.)* . . . **RIGOLETTO**, *with June* Anderson, Jerry Hadley, and Juan Pons; Guido Ajmone-Marsan. (Sept. 26 and Oct. 3 at 8.) . . . With Sumi Jo, Jerry Hadley, and Juan Pons; Guido Ajmone-Marsan. (Sept. 29 at 1.) . . . **DON GIOVANNI**, with Cheryl Studer, Patricia Schuman, Hans Peter Blochwitz, Thomas Hampson, and Paul Plishka; James Levine. (Sept. 27 and Oct. 1 at 8.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA—**LA BOHÈME**, with Stephanie Friede, Cynthia Lawrence, Martin Thompson, and Carlos Serrano; conducted by Joseph Colaneri. (Sept. 25 at 8 and Sept. 29 at 2.) . . . **MADAME BUTTERFLY**, with Catherine Lamy, Susanne Marsee, Robert Brubaker, and Carlos Serrano; Mark Gibson. (Sept. 26 at 8 and Sept. 30 at 2.) . . . With Elizabeth Holleque, Robynne Redmon, Martin Thompson, and Eugene Perry; Mark Gibson. (Oct. 2 at 8.) . . . **MOSES UND ARON**, Schoenberg's most extensive opera (rich in twelve-tone methodology), written between 1928 and 1932. With Richard Cross and Thomas Young; Christopher Keene. (Sept. 27 and Oct. 3 at 8.) . . . **STREET SCENE**, a revival of Kurt Weill's 1947 classic, with Claudia Cummings, Sandra Moon, Michele McBride, Josepha Gayer, Bronwyn Thomas, Michael Rees Davis, and Charles Karel; Chris Nance. (Sept. 29 at 8.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

"IRON BOW ROMANCE"—A cast of forty-five and an orchestra of traditional Chinese instruments present a fully staged production of this Ching-dynasty comic opera. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 431-9740. Sept. 28 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRAS

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC—At Avery Fisher Hall, Zubin Mehta conducting. Sept. 25 at 7:30: Mozart's "Linz" Symphony, Stravinsky's "Symphony in Three Movements," and Chopin's Second Piano Concerto, with Evgeny Kissin. . . . ¶ Sept. 26-27 at 8, Sept. 28 at 2, and Oct. 2 at 7:30: Music by Barber (including "Knoxville: Summer of 1915") and Richard Strauss, with soprano Marvis Martin. . . . ¶ Oct. 3 at 8: Weber's "Oberon" Overture, and concertos by Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, with pianist Daniel Barenboim (a benefit concert).

LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC—André Previn conducts the initial concerts of Carnegie Hall's centennial season. Sept. 26 at 7:30: Beethoven's "Leonore" Overture No. 3 (which was played at the hall's first concert in 1891), and two works written in 1941 (the midpoint of the hall's history): William Schuman's Third Symphony, and Barber's Violin Concerto, with Itzhak Perlman. . . . ¶ Sept. 27 at 8: Vaughan Williams' Fifth Symphony, Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto (with Emanuel Ax), and the world première of Steven Stucky's "Angelus."

MANHATTAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA—Gunther Schuller conducts the New York première of Vittorio Giannini's "Medead," a four-movement symphonic monodrama, with soprano Johanna Meier, as well as music by Barber and Stravinsky. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. Sept. 27 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA—Riccardo Muti conducts symphonies by Tchaikovsky and Richard Wernick, and Bruch's G-Minor Violin Concerto, with Kyung Wha Chung. (Carnegie Hall. Oct. 2 at 8.)

PHILHARMONIA VIRTUOSI—Richard Kapp conducts music by Haydn, Hindemith, and Frank Martin, and Mozart's Flute and Harp Concerto, with Michael Parloff and Marie-Pierre Langlamet. (Town Hall. Oct. 2 at 8.)

RECITALS

DORIAN WIND QUINTET—In an all-Mozart concert. (Hunter College Playhouse, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Sept. 24 at 7.)

YO-YO MA AND EMANUEL AX—The cello-piano team plays a work they commissioned—William Bolcom's Cello Sonata (1989)—as well as Beethoven and Chopin. (92nd Street Y. Sept. 24 at 8.)

JACQUES DESPRES—Discussing Chopin's four Ballades, and playing them on a historic Érard piano. (Bösendorfer Center, 406 E. 79th St. Sept. 25 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

BOSTON MUSEUM TRIO—Daniel Stepner (baroque violin), Laura Jeppesen (viola da gamba), and John Gibbons (harpsichord) play music by Bach, Rameau, Marais, and others. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Sept. 26 at 8.)

Bargemusic—Chamber music by Schubert, Dohnányi, and Brahms (his A-Major Piano Quartet), performed by Edward Auer (piano), Ik-Hwan Bae (violin), Paul Coletti (viola), and Carter Brey (cello). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061. Sept. 27 at 7:30 and Sept. 30 at 4.)

Evgeny Kissin—Piano, in his New York recital début, performing Schumann, Liszt, and Prokofiev. (Carnegie Hall. Sept. 30 at 3.)

Music Before 1800—For fifteen years, Music Before 1800 has introduced many of the world's notable early-music performers to New York audiences. The organization marks its anniversary by presenting four local partisans of the "authenticity movement": Anonymous 4 (a vocal quartet), singing a Lady Mass from medieval England; the Four Nations Ensemble, playing French baroque chamber music; organist Donald Joyce, performing sixteenth-century Iberian works (including one on the *pajaritos,* a miniature water organ that imitates birdcalls); and La Stravaganza of New York (a baroque chamber orchestra, conducted by Dongsok Shin), offering concertos of Bach and Vivaldi. (Corpus Christi Church, W. 121st St., just east of Broadway. Sept. 30 at 4. For information about tickets, call 666-0675.)

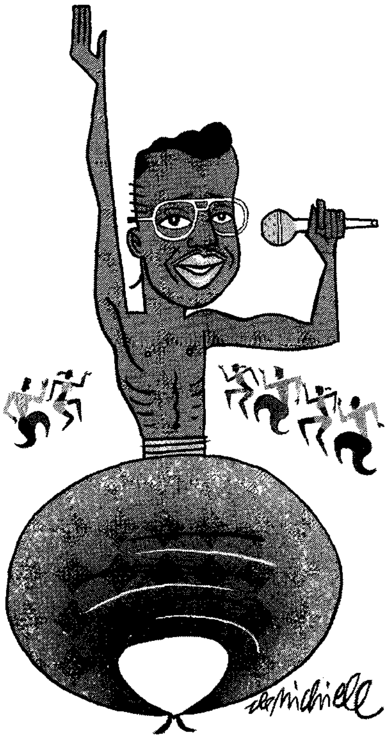
"Bachanalia"—Music by Bach, with violinist Nina Beilina, oboist Humbert Lucarelli, harpsichordist Gerald Ranck, and others. (Ethical Culture Society, 2 W. 64th St. 865-8999. Sept. 30 at 4.)

John Solum and Igor Kipnis—Baroque flute and harpsichord, performing music by Bach. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Sept. 30 at 5.)

Mstislav Rostropovich—Cello, performs Bach's fifth unaccompanied suite and, with pianist Lambert Orkis, music by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, and Astor Piazzolla. (Carnegie Hall. Oct. 1 at 8.)

Manhattan String Quartet—In the first of four evenings exploring the string quartets of Bartók and Schoenberg, the group performs Bartók's first and fourth, and Schoenberg's first. (Town Hall. Oct. 1 at 8.)

Alan Mandel—Piano, in an all-American recital of Ives, Elie Siegmeister, and world premières of works by Irwin Bazelon and Harold Seletsky. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. Oct. 1 at 8.)



M. C. Hammer at the Meadowlands

Jeffrey Siegel—Piano, performing and discussing two Mozart sonatas. (92nd Street Y. Oct. 2 at 8.)

Juilliard String Quartet—Music of Schubert, including the C-Major Quintet (with guest cellist Bernard Greenhouse). (Carnegie Hall. Oct. 3 at 8.)

JAZZ / POP / ROCK

M. C. Hammer—Oakland, California's latest rebuttal to Gertrude Stein's ethereal jibe "There is no there there" is the undisturbing, industrial-strength rapper M. C. Hammer (Stanley Kirk Burrell), whose second album, "Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em," is the best-selling record of the year. The hit single is the infectious (or maddening) "U Can't Touch This," an agile, bragging sales pitch delivered over a repeated, jingle-like riff from a Rick James song called "Super Freak." Hammer's stage show offers a show-business bang for your buck: it's an aerobic spectacle featuring the star's rubber-limbed moves, fifteen dancers, twelve backup singers, seven musicians, and exploding flash bombs. Hammer's gimlet-eyed calculation makes his act more impressive than exciting—it's still not clear what his success is going to be about, except for success. (Meadowlands Arena. 1-201 935-3900. Sept. 28 at 8.)

Phil Collins—Madison Square Garden. 563-8300. Sept. 28-29 and Oct. 1-2, all at 8.

Bill Mays and Peter Washington—In a concert sponsored by the Duke Ellington Society. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. Sept. 26 at 7. Admission by contribution.)

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds—Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Sept. 28 at 8.

Adam Makowicz—Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. Sept. 30 at 3. No tickets necessary.

SPORTS

HOME TEAMS

Mets—Vs. the Chicago Cubs, Sept. 28 at 7:35 and Sept. 29-30 at 1:35.

Yankees—Vs. the Baltimore Orioles, Sept. 24-26 at 7:30. . . . ¶ Vs. the Detroit Tigers, Oct. 1-3 at 7:30.

Jets—Vs. the Buffalo Bills, Sept. 24 at 9.

Giants—Vs. the Dallas Cowboys, Sept. 30 at 1. (Home base for the Mets is Shea Stadium, 1-718 507-8499; for the Yankees, Yankee Stadium, 293-6000; and for the Jets and the Giants, Giants Stadium, the Meadowlands. For information about Jets tickets, call 421-6600, and for information about Giants tickets, call 1-201 935-8111.)

RACING

Horses—At Belmont: Daily, except Tuesdays, at 1. The Vosburgh is on Sept. 29. Through Oct. 29. . . . At the Meadowlands: Weeknights, except Sept. 24, at 7:30. . . . **Trotting** at Yonkers Raceway: Weeknights at 8, and Tuesdays at 1.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Tribute—Native Americans from the New York City area present an evening of Native American arts. Performers include the Colorado Sisters (Vira and Hortensia), who are storytellers; the Thunderbird Dancers; and Pura Fe, a group of drummers and vocalists. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. Sept. 27 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

Talks—Sept. 26 at 8: Ed Koch and Herbert London discuss New York City's money problems. (Bobst Library, New York University, 70 Washington Sq. S. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Sept. 27 at 5:45: A screening of the Québecoise television film "Paper Wedding" will be followed by a talk with its director, Michel Brault, and its star, Geneviève Bujold. (Americas Society, Park Ave. at 68th St. 249-8950.) . . . ¶ Oct. 3 at 8: Jules Feiffer on "The Political Cartoonist and the Media." (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. No tickets necessary.)

Readings—Oct. 2 at 7:30: Agnes de Mille will read from her new book, "Portrait Gallery." (Books & Co., 939 Madison Ave., at 74th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Oct. 2 at 8: Steve Erickson and Daniel Moyano will read from their own works. (Gas Station, 221 E. 2nd St. Tickets at the door on the night of the reading.) . . . ¶ Oct. 3 at 8: T. Coraghessan Boyle, John Calvin Batchelor, and William T. Vollmann will read from their own prose. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. Tickets at the door.)

Memoranda—The New York Armory Antiques Show, at the 7th Regiment Armory, is Sept. 26, from 4 to 9; Sept. 27-29, from noon to 9; and Sept. 30, from noon to 6. (Park Ave. at 66th St.; call 794-4772.) . . . ¶ Yom Kippur starts at sundown on Sept. 28.

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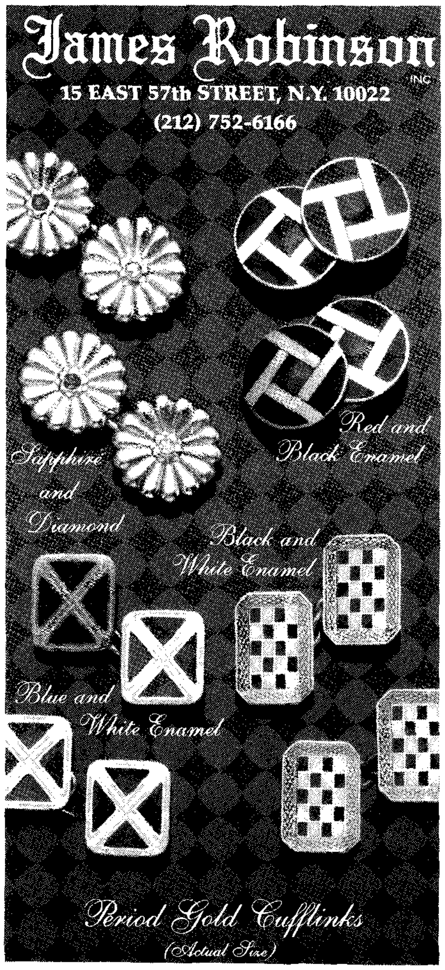

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

THE MOVIE HOUSES

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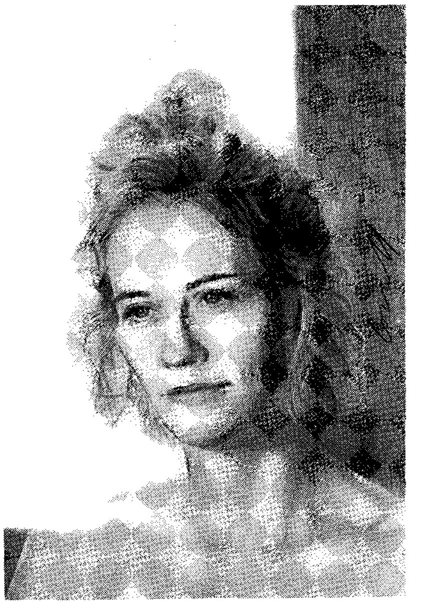
FILMS ACCOMPANIED BY A DAGGER ARE DESCRIBED IN THE "IN BRIEF" SECTION, STARTING ON PAGE 22.



Cybill Shepherd in "Texasville"

EAST SIDE

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St. (995-2000)
Theatre 1: "May Fools" (†).
Theatre 2: "After Dark, My Sweet" (directed by James Foley), with Jason Patric, Rachel Ward, and Bruce Dern.
Theatre 3: "Akira Kurosawa's Dreams" (†).
Theatre 4: Through Sept. 27: "Pump Up the Volume" (Allan Moyle), with Christian Slater, Samantha Mathis, Scott Paulin, and Ellen Greene. From Sept. 28: "King of New York" (Abel Ferrara), with Christopher Walken, David Caruso, Larry Fishburne, and Wesley Snipes.
Theatre 5: "Wild at Heart" (†).
Theatre 6: "The Tall Guy" (†).

Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171)
"Landscape in the Mist" (Theo Angelopoulos; in Greek).

Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 36 E. 8th. (477-6600)
Theatre 1: "Narrow Margin" (Peter Hyams), with Gene Hackman and Anne Archer.
Theatre 2: "Funny About Love" (Leonard Nimoy), with Gene Wilder, Christine Lahti, and Mary Stuart Masterson.
Theatre 3: "GoodFellas" (†).

Bijou Cinema, 3rd Ave. between 12th and 13th. (505-7320)
To be announced.

Loews 19th Street East 6, B'way at 19th. (260-8000)
Theatre 1: "GoodFellas" (†).
Theatre 2: "State of Grace" (Phil Joanou), with Sean Penn, Ed Harris, Gary Oldman, and Robin Wright.
Theatre 3: "Ghost" (†).
Theatre 4: Through Sept. 27: "Death Warrant" (Deran Sarafian), with Jean-Claude Van Damme. From Sept. 28: "King of New York" (Abel Ferrara), with Christopher Walken, David Caruso, Larry Fishburne, and Wesley Snipes.
Theatre 5: "Narrow Margin" (Peter Hyams), with Gene Hackman and Anne Archer.
Theatre 6: "Funny About Love" (Leonard Nimoy), with Gene Wilder, Christine Lahti, and Mary Stuart Masterson.

Gramercy, Lexington at 23rd. (475-1660)
"The Tall Guy" (†).

Bay Cinema, 2nd Ave. at 32nd. (679-0160)
"Postcards from the Edge" (Mike Nichols), with Meryl Streep, Shirley MacLaine, Dennis Quaid, Gene Hackman, and Richard Dreyfuss.

Loews 34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th. (532-5544)
Theatre 1: "Ghost" (†).
Theatre 2: "Funny About Love" (Leonard Nimoy), with Gene Wilder, Christine Lahti, and Mary Stuart Masterson.
Theatre 3: "State of Grace" (Phil Joanou), with Sean Penn, Ed Harris, Gary Oldman, and Robin Wright.

34th St. East, 241 E. 34th. (683-0255)
Through Sept. 27: "Presumed Innocent" (†). From Sept. 28: "Pacific Heights" (John Schlesinger), with Melanie Griffith, Matthew Modine, and Michael Keaton.

Eastside Cinema, 3rd Ave. at 55th. (755-3020)
"The Witches" (†).

Sutton 1 and 2, 3rd Ave. at 57th. (759-1411)
Theatre 1: "Hardware" (Richard Stanley), with Dylan McDermott and Stacey Travis.
Theatre 2: "The Tall Guy" (†).

Gotham Cinema, 3rd Ave. at 58th. (759-2262)
Through Sept. 27: "The Sound of Music" (†). From Sept. 28: "Pacific Heights" (John Schlesinger), with Melanie Griffith, Matthew Modine, and Michael Keaton.

Plaza, 42 E. 58th. (355-3320)
"After Dark, My Sweet" (James Foley), with Jason Patric, Rachel Ward, and Bruce Dern.

Manhattan Twin, 3rd Ave. at 59th. (935-6420)
Theatre 1: Through Sept. 27: "The Lemon Sisters" (Joyce Chopra), with Diane Keaton, Carol Kane, and Kathryn Grody. From Sept. 28: "Texasville" (Peter Bogdanovich), with Jeff Bridges, Cybill Shepherd, and Annie Potts.
Theatre 2: "Darkman" (†).

59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th. (759-4630)
"Flatliners" (†).

Baronet and Coronet, 3rd Ave. at 59th. (355-1663)
Theatre 1: "Don't Tell Her It's Me" (Malcolm Mowbray), with Steve Guttenberg, Jami Gertz, and Kyle MacLachlan.
Theatre 2: "Miller's Crossing" (Joel Coen), with Gabriel Byrne, Albert Finney, Marcia Gay Harden, and John Turturro.

Cinema I, Cinema II, and Cinema 3rd Avenue, 3rd Ave. at 60th. (753-6022)
Theatre 1: "GoodFellas" (†).
Theatre 2: "Presumed Innocent" (†).
Theatre 3: "Interrogation" (Richard Bugajski, in Polish).

Gemini 1 and 2, 2nd Ave. at 64th. (832-1670)
Theatre 1: "Narrow Margin" (Peter Hyams), with Gene Hackman and Anne Archer.
Theatre 2: "The Freshman" (†).

Beekman, 2nd Ave. at 66th. (737-2622)
"Postcards from the Edge" (Mike Nichols), with Meryl Streep and Shirley MacLaine.

Loews New York Twin, 2nd Ave. at 67th. (744-7339)
Theatre 1: "State of Grace" (Phil Joanou), with Sean Penn, Ed Harris, Gary Oldman, and Robin Wright.
Theatre 2: "Funny About Love" (Leonard Nimoy), with Gene Wilder.

68th St. Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 68th. (734-0302)
"White Hunter, Black Heart" (Clint Eastwood), with Eastwood and Jeff Fahey.

Loews Tower East, 3rd Ave. at 71st. (879-1313)
"Ghost" (†).

U. A. East, 1st Ave. at 85th. (249-5100)
"Funny About Love" (Leonard Nimoy), with Gene Wilder.

Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th. (534-1880)
Theatre 1: "Don't Tell Her It's Me" (Malcolm Mowbray), with Steve Guttenberg.
Theatre 2: Through Sept. 27: "Hardware" (Richard Stanley), with Dylan McDermott and Stacey Travis. From Sept. 28: "I Come in Peace" (Craig R. Baxley), with Dolph Lundgren.

86th Street East Twin, 3rd Ave. at 86th. (249-1144)
Theatre 1: "GoodFellas" (†).
Theatre 2: Through Sept. 27: "Death Warrant" (Deran Sarafian), with Jean-Claude Van Damme. From Sept. 28: "Texasville" (Peter Bogdanovich), with Jeff Bridges, Cybill Shepherd, and Annie Potts.

WEST SIDE

Film Forum, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)
Theatre 1: Through Sept. 25: "The Camp at Thiaroye" (1988, directed by Ousmane Sembène and Thierno Faty Sow; in French). From Sept. 26: "Berkeley in the Sixties" (Mark Kitchell), a documentary.
Theatre 2: See listings under Revival Houses.
Theatre 3: "Solaris" (1976, Andrei Tarkovsky; in Russian).

Waverly 1 and 2, 6th Ave. at 3rd. (929-8037)
Theatre 1: Through Sept. 27: "Hardware" (Richard Stanley), with Dylan McDermott and Stacey Travis. From Sept. 28: "Pacific Heights" (John Schlesinger), with Melanie Griffith, Matthew Modine, and Michael Keaton.
Theatre 2: "Darkman" (†).

8th St. Playhouse, 52 W. 8th. (674-6515)
"White Hunter, Black Heart" (Clint Eastwood), with Eastwood and Jeff Fahey.

Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th. (929-3350)
Theatre 1: "Postcards from the Edge" (Mike Nichols), with Meryl Streep and Shirley MacLaine.
Theatre 2: Through Sept. 27: "Ghost" (†). From Sept. 28: "Texasville" (Peter Bogdanovich), with Jeff Bridges, Cybill Shepherd, and Annie Potts.

Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th. (255-8800)
Theatre 1: "The Witches" (†).
Theatre 2: "Presumed Innocent" (†).
Theatre 3: "Cinema Paradiso" (Giuseppe Tornatore; in Italian).
Theatre 4: "Don't Tell Her It's Me" (Malcolm Mowbray), with Steve Guttenberg.

Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd. (691-4744)
Theatre 1: "After Dark, My Sweet" (James Foley), with Jason Patric, Rachel Ward, and Bruce Dern.
Theatre 2: "Don't Tell Her It's Me" (Malcolm Mowbray), with Steve Guttenberg.
Theatre 3: "Hardware" (Richard Stanley).
Theatre 4: "Postcards from the Edge" (Mike Nichols), with Meryl Streep and Shirley MacLaine.
Theatre 5: "Flatliners" (†).
Theatre 6: Through Sept. 27: "Mo' Better Blues" (†). From Sept. 28: "Texasville" (Peter Bogdanovich), with Jeff Bridges, Cybill Shepherd, and Annie Potts.
Theatre 7: Through Sept. 27: "Postcards from the Edge." From Sept. 28: "Pacific Heights" (John Schlesinger), with Melanie Griffith, Matthew Modine, and Michael Keaton.
Theatre 8: "Wild at Heart" (†).
Theatre 9: "Darkman" (†).

23rd St. West Triplex, 333 W. 23rd. (989-0060)
Theatre 1: Through Sept. 27: "The Lemon Sisters" (Joyce Chopra), with Diane Keaton, Carol Kane, and Kathryn Grody. From Sept. 28: "I Come in Peace" (Craig R. Baxley), with Dolph Lundgren.
Theatre 2: "The Freshman" (†).
Theatre 3: "Presumed Innocent" (†).

Guild, 33 W. 50th. (757-2406)
"Pretty Woman" (†).

Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between 8th and 9th Aves. (246-1583)
Theatre 1: "Hardware" (Richard Stanley).
Theatre 2: "Flatliners" (†).
Theatre 3: "Don't Tell Her It's Me" (Malcolm Mowbray), with Steve Guttenberg.
Theatre 4: Through Sept. 27: "The Freshman" (†). From Sept. 28: "Texasville" (Peter Bogdanovich), with Jeff Bridges, Cybill Shepherd, and Annie Potts.
Theatre 5: "Darkman" (†).
Theatre 6: "After Dark, My Sweet" (James Foley), with Jason Patric, Rachel Ward, and Bruce Dern.

Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th. (765-7600)
"Postcards from the Edge" (Mike Nichols), with Meryl Streep and Shirley MacLaine.

Loews Festival, 6 W. 57th. (307-7856)
"State of Grace" (Phil Joanou), with Sean Penn, Ed Harris, Gary Oldman, and Robin Wright.

57th St. Playhouse, 110 W. 57th. (581-7360)
"Akira Kurosawa's Dreams" (†).

Carnegie Hall Cinema, 7th Ave. between 56th and 57th. (265-2520)
"Fools of Fortune" (Pat O'Connor), with Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Iain Glen, and Julie Christie.

Carnegie Screening Room, 7th Ave. between 56th and 57th. (757-2131)
"The Unbelievable Truth" (Hal Hartley).

Loews Fine Arts, 4 W. 58th. (980-5656)
"Metropolitan" (Whit Stillman).

Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th. (752-5959)
"Wild at Heart"(†).

Loews Paramount, B'way at 61st. (247-5070)
"Ghost" (†).

62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd. (265-7466)
Through Sept. 27: "Wild at Heart" (†).
From Sept. 28: "Pacific Heights" (John Schlesinger), with Melanie Griffith, Matthew Modine, and Michael Keaton.

Lincoln Plaza 1, 2, and 3, B'way at 63rd. (757-2280)
Theatre 1: "The Icicle Thief" (Maurizio Nichetti; in Italian), with Nichetti.
Theatre 2: "Cinema Paradiso" (Giuseppe Tornatore; in Italian), with Philippe Noiret and Salvatore Cascio.
Theatre 3: "Life and Nothing But" (Bertrand Tavernier; in French), with Philippe Noiret, Sabine Azema, and Pascale Vignal.

Regency, B'way at 67th. (724-3700)
"Postcards from the Edge" (Mike Nichols), with Meryl Streep and Shirley MacLaine.

Loews 84th Street Sixplex, B'way at 84th. (877-3600)
Theatre 1: "State of Grace" (Phil Joanou), with Sean Penn, Ed Harris, Gary Oldman, and Robin Wright.
Theatre 2: Through Sept. 27: "Death Warrant" (Deran Sarafian) with Jean-Claude Van Damme. From Sept. 28: "King of New York" (Abel Ferrara), with Christopher Walken.
Theatre 3: "Narrow Margin" (Peter Hyams), with Gene Hackman and Anne Archer.
Theatre 4: "Presumed Innocent" (†).
Theatre 5: "GoodFellas" (†).
Theatre 6: "Funny About Love" (Leonard Nimoy), with Gene Wilder.

Metro Cinema 1 and 2, B'way at 99th. (222-1200)
Theatre 1: Through Sept. 27: "Mo' Better Blues" (†). From Sept. 28: "I Come in Peace" (Craig R. Baxley), with Dolph Lundgren.
Theatre 2: Through Sept. 27: "Hardware" (Richard Stanley), with Dylan McDermott and Stacey Travis. From Sept. 28: "Texasville" (Peter Bogdanovich), with Jeff Bridges, Cybill Shepherd, and Annie Potts.

Olympia I and II, B'way at 107th. (865-8128)
Theatre 1: "Darkman" (†).
Theatre 2: "Don't Tell Her It's Me" (Malcolm Mowbray), with Steve Guttenberg.

TIMES SQUARE AREA

Criterion Center, B'way at 44th. (354-0900)
Theatre 1: "GoodFellas" (†).
Theatre 2: "Mo' Better Blues" (†).
Theatre 3: "Narrow Margin" (directed by Peter Hyams), with Gene Hackman and Anne Archer.
Theatre 4: "Die Hard 2" (Renny Harlin), with Bruce Willis.
Theatre 5: "Presumed Innocent" (†).
Theatre 6: Through Sept. 27: "Def by Temptation" (James Bond III). From Sept. 28: "Pacific Heights" (John Schlesinger), with Melanie Griffith, Matthew Modine, and Michael Keaton.

Embassy 1, B'way at 46th. (302-0494)
"State of Grace" (Phil Joanou), with Sean Penn, Ed Harris, Gary Oldman, and Robin Wright.

Embassy 2, 3, and 4, 7th Ave. at 47th. (730-7262)
Theatre 1: "Funny About Love" (Leonard Nimoy), with Gene Wilder.
Theatre 2: "Delta Force 2" (Aaron Norris), with Chuck Norris.
Theatre 3: "Delta Force 2."

Loews Astor Plaza, 44th St. at B'way. (869-8340)
Through Sept 27: "Death Warrant" (Deran Sarafian), with Jean-Claude Van Damme.
From Sept. 28: "King of New York" (Abel Ferrara), with Christopher Walken.

National Twin, B'way at 44th. (869-0950)
Theatre 1: Through Sept. 27: "Hardware" (Richard Stanley), with Dylan McDermott and Stacey Travis. From Sept. 28: "I Come in Peace" (Craig R. Baxley), with Dolph Lundgren.
Theatre 2: "Darkman" (†).

West Side Cinema 1 and 2, 7th Ave. at 48th. (398-1720)
Theatre 1: "My Blue Heaven" (†).
Theatre 2: "The Witches" (†).

REVIVAL HOUSES

Biograph Cinema, 225 W. 57th. (582-4582)
Sept. 24: "State Fair" (1945, directed by Walter Lang), with Jeanne Crain, Dana Andrews, Charles Winninger, Fay Bainter, Dick Haymes, and Vivian Blaine; and "Calamity Jane" (1953, David Butler), with Doris Day and Howard Keel.
Sept. 25-26: "Free and Easy" (1930, Edward Sedgwick), with Buster Keaton, Anita Page, Robert Montgomery, and Trixie Friganza; and "Whoopee" (1930, Thornton Freeland), with Eddie Cantor.
Sept. 27-29: "Li'l Abner" (1959, Melvin Frank), with Peter Palmer, Leslie Parrish, and Stubby Kaye; and "Red Garters" (1954, George Marshall), with Rosemary Clooney, Jack Carson, Guy Mitchell, and Gene Barry.
Sept. 30-Oct. 1: "Here Comes the Groom" (1951, Frank Capra), with Bing Crosby, Jane Wyman, Alexis Smith, and Franchot Tone; and "Good News" (†).
Oct. 2-3: "Let Freedom Ring" (1939, Jack Conway), with Virginia Bruce, Nelson Eddy, Lionel Barrymore, Edward Arnold, and Victor McLaglan; and "Where Do We Go From Here?" (1945, Gregory Ratoff), with June Haver and Fred MacMurray.

Film Forum 2, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)
Sept. 24: "The Palm Beach Story" (1942, Preston Sturges), with Claudette Colbert, Joel McCrea, Mary Astor, and Rudy Vallée; and "Christmas in July" (1940, Sturges), with Ellen Drew and Dick Powell.
Sept. 25-26: "The Power and the Glory" (1933, William K. Howard), with Spencer Tracy, Colleen Moore, Helen Vinson, and Ralph Morgan; and "Diamond Jim" (1935, Edward Sutherland), with Edward Arnold, Binnie Barnes, and Jean Arthur.
Sept. 27: "Never Say Die" (1939, Elliott Nugent), with Bob Hope, Martha Raye, Andy Devine, and Alan Mowbray; "Hotel Haywire" (1937, George Archainbaud), with Leo Carrillo, Lynne Overman, and Mary Carlisle; and "College Swing" (1938, Raoul Walsh), with George Burns, Gracie Allen, Martha Raye, and Bob Hope.
Sept. 28-Oct. 1: "The Lady Eve" (1941, Preston Sturges), with Barbara Stanwyck, Henry Fonda, and Charles Colburn; and "Remember the Night" (1940, Mitchell Leisen), with Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray.
Oct. 2-3: "If I Were King" (†); and "We Live Again" (1934, Rouben Mamoulian), with Fredric March, Anna Sten, Jane Baxter, and C. Aubrey Smith.

Theatre 80 St. Marks, 80 St. Marks Pl. (254-7400)
Sept. 24: "Woman in the Dunes" (1964, Hiroshi Teshigahara; in Japanese), with Eiji Okada; and "The Face of Another" (1966, Teshigahara).
Sept. 25: "Nickelodeon" (1976, Peter Bogdanovich), with Ryan O'Neal, Burt Reynolds, Tatum O'Neal, and Brian Keith; and "Jeanne Eagels" (1957, George Sidney), with Kim Novak and Jeff Chandler.
Sept. 26: "The Scarlet Empress" (1934, Josef von Sternberg), with Marlene Dietrich, Sam Jaffe, and John Lodge; and "The Devil Is a Woman" (1935, von Sternberg), with Marlene Dietrich and Lionel Atwill.
Sept. 27: "No Way to Treat a Lady" (1968, Jack Smight), with Rod Steiger, George Segal, Lee Remick, and Eileen Heckart; and "Dressed to Kill" (†).
Sept. 28-29: "The Lady from Shanghai" (1948, Orson Welles), with Rita Hayworth, Welles, and Everett Sloane; and "Gilda" (†).
Sept. 30: "North by Northwest" (1959, Alfred Hitchcock), with Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint; and "The Paradine Case" (1948, Hitchcock), with Gregory Peck and Ann Todd.
Oct. 1: "Through a Glass Darkly" (1962, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish), with Harriet Andersson, Gunnar Björnstrand, Max von Sydow, and Lars Passgård; and "The Silence" (1964, Bergman), with Ingrid Thulin and Gunnel Lindblom.
Oct. 2: "Fat City" (†); and "Beat the Devil" (1954, John Huston), with Humphrey Bogart, Jennifer Jones, Gina Lollobrigida, Robert Morley, and Peter Lorre.
Oct. 3: "An American in Paris" (†); and "Rhapsody in Blue" (1945, Irving Rapper), with Joan Leslie, Robert Alda, Alexis Smith, and Oscar Levant.

FILM LIBRARIES, ETC.

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9490)—Sept. 24 at 2:30: "The Kiss" (1929, directed by Jacques Feyder; silent), with Greta Garbo, Conard Nagel, and Lew Ayres. . . . ¶ Sept. 24 at 6: "Flesh and the Devil" (1926, Clarence Brown; silent), with Greta Garbo, John Gilbert, and Lars Hanson. . . . ¶ Sept. 25 at 3: "Ninotchka" (1939, Ernst Lubitsch), with Greta Garbo, Melvyn Douglas, Ina Claire, and Bela Lugosi. . . . ¶ Sept. 25 at 6: "Camille" (1926, George Cukor), with Greta Garbo, Robert Taylor, and Lionel Barrymore. . . . ¶ Sept. 27 at 2:30: "The Heart of a Tyrant" (1981, Miklós Jancsó; in Hungarian). . . . ¶ Sept. 27 at 6: "Season of Monsters" (1987, Miklós Jancsó; in Hungarian) and "Presence" (1986, Jancsó; in Hungarian). . . . ¶ Sept. 28 at 2:30: "Jesus Christ's Horoscope" (1988, Miklós Jancsó). . . . ¶ Sept. 28 at 6: "Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise" (1931, Robert Z. Leonard), with Greta Garbo, Clark Gable, and Jean Hersholt. . . . ¶ Sept. 29 at noon: "The Kiss." . . . ¶ Sept. 29 at 2: "The Heart of a Tyrant." . . . ¶ Sept. 29 at 5: "Season of Monsters" and "Presence." . . . ¶ Sept. 30 at noon: "Flesh and the Devil." . . . ¶ Sept. 30 at 2: "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" (1966, Richard Lester), with Zero Mostel, Phil Silvers, Buster Keaton, and Jack Gilford. . . . ¶ Sept. 30 at 5: "Jesus Christ's Horoscope." . . . ¶ Oct. 1 at 2:30: "Talk of the Town" (1942, George Stevens), with Jean Arthur, Cary Grant, and Ronald Colman. . . . ¶ Oct. 1 at 6: "Satan in Sables" (1925, James Flood; silent), with Lowell Sherman, John Harron, and Pauline Garon. . . . ¶ Oct. 2 at 2:30: "Zoo in Budapest" (1933, Rowland V. Lee), with Loretta Young, Gene Raymond, and O. P. Heggie. . . . ¶ Oct. 2 at 6: "The Yellow Ticket" (1931, Raoul Walsh), with Laurence

The 1967 biker quickie "Hell's Angels on Wheels" (playing Sept. 27-29 at the Anthology Film Archives) takes you back to an era of gasoline-fuelled rebellion and marijuana-smoked hijinks. Photographed by Laszlo Kovacs (then going by the first name Leslie) and co-starring Jack Nicholson in one of his showiest pre-"Easy Rider" roles, the film goes hog-wild. The director, Richard Rush (who went on to make "The Stunt Man"), worked with members of the California biker club and used as his major background source Hunter S. Thompson's "Hell's Angels." The movie is a reporter's sketchbook rendered as an exploitation flick, with a basic plot and cutout characters.

Adam Roarke plays Buddy, the head of the Angels, and Nicholson plays Poet (!), a gas jockey who joins the club. Rush has Buddy quote the same line from "Paradise Lost" that Thompson did: "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." Poet comes to realize that there are a lot of slaves in Buddy's Hell, and he doesn't want to be one of them. Until that realization, however, he delights in the rumbles and the orgies—which allows Nicholson to give his baby-faced-killer grin a thorough workout.

The opening credits are a rambunctious tour de force in which the cyclists blast their way through a sultry San Francisco morning and then converge on the roadways like Cossack armies swarming over the Russian steppes. Rush seems happiest celebrating the Angels as a latter-day outlaw gang. When they race up a steep hill, the camera does its own somersaults and wheelies just to keep up with them. At its best, the film boasts a zest and spontaneity that have disappeared from exploitation moviemaking.

MOVIE HOUSES–Cont'd

Olivier, Elissa Landi, and Lionel Barrymore.

New York Film Festival—A series of international film at Alice Tully Hall—Sept. 24 at 6:15: "Doctor Petiot" (Christian de Chalonge, France). . . . ¶ Sept. 24 at 9:30 and Sept. 25 at 6: "Tilai" (Idrissa Ouedraogo, Burkina Faso). . . . ¶ Sept. 25 at 8:30: "A Tale of Springtime" (Eric Rohmer, France). . . . ¶ Sept. 26 at 6:15: "Privilege" (Yvonne Rainer, United States). . . . ¶ Sept. 26 at 9:15: "No, Or the Vain Glory of Command" (Manoel de Oliveira, Portugal). . . . ¶ Sept. 27 at 6:15: "A Tale of Springtime." . . . ¶ Sept. 27 at 9:15: "Open Doors" (Gianni Amelio, Italy). . . . ¶ Sept. 28 at 6:15: "Night Sun" (Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, Italy). . . . ¶ Sept. 28 at 9:15: "The Sting of Death" (Kohei Oguri, Japan). . . . ¶ Sept. 29 at 12:30: "Open Doors." . . . ¶ Sept. 29 at 3:30: "No, Or the Vain Glory of Command." . . . ¶ Sept. 29 at 6:30: "Nouvelle Vague" (Jean-Luc Godard, Switzerland/France). . . . ¶ Sept. 29 at 9: "Night Sun." . . . ¶ Sept. 29 at midnight: "The Golden Boat" (Raul Ruiz, United States). . . . ¶ Sept. 30 at 1:30: "The Sting of Death." . . . ¶ Sept. 30 at 4:30: "Siddheshwari" (Mani Kaul, India). . . . ¶ Sept. 30 at 7: "Pièce Touchée" (Martin Arnold, Austria), "Scenes from the Life of Andy Warhol" (Jonas Mekas, United States), and "Sink or Swim" (Su Friedrich, United States). . . . ¶ Sept. 30 at 9:45 and Oct. 1 at 6:15: "A Woman's Revenge" (Jacques Doillon, France). . . . ¶ Oct. 1 at 9:30 and Oct. 2 at 6:15: "Taxi Blues" (Pavel Lounguine, U.S.S.R.). . . . ¶ Oct. 2 at 9:15: "Nouvelle Vague." . . . ¶ Oct. 3 at 6:15: "The Match Factory Girl" (Aki Kaurismäki, Finland). . . . ¶ Oct. 3 at 9: "Listen Up: The Lives of Quincy Jones" (Ellen Weissbrod and Courtney Sale Ross, United States). (For tickets, call 362-1911.)

Museum of Broadcasting, 1 E. 53rd St. (752-7684)—"MB Playhouse," dramas shown on television over the past thirty years. Sept. 25-29: Horton Foote's "Travelling Lady" (1957, CBS), with Kim Stanley and Robert Loggia. . . . From Oct. 2: Sumner Locke Elliot's "Wish on the Moon" (1953, NBC), with Eva Marie Saint; and F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Rich Boy" (1952, NBC), with Grace Kelly. Showings Tuesdays at 3 and 6, Wednesdays through Fridays at 3, and Saturdays at 1.

Anthology Film Archives, 32-34 Second Ave., at Second St. (477-2714)—Films showing in either the Courthouse Theatre or the Maya Deren Theatre. Sept. 24-30 at 7: "How to Be Louise" (1989, Anne Flournoy); and "Moona Luna" (1990, Emily Breer). . . . ¶ Sept. 24-25 at 7, Sept. 26-30 at 9, Oct. 1-2 at 7, and Oct. 3 at 9: "Permanent Vacation" (1980, Jim Jarmusch). . . . ¶ Sept. 26 at 7: "I Was Born . . . But" (1932, Yasujiro Ozu, in Japanese). . . . ¶ Sept. 26 at 9: "The Adventures of the Exquisite Corpse, Part I" (1967, Andrew Noren) and "Chumlum" (1964, Ron Rice). . . . ¶ Sept. 27 and 29 at 7 and Sept. 28 at 9: "Hell's Angels on Wheels" (see page 21). . . . ¶ Sept. 27 at 9, Sept. 28 and 30 at 7, and Sept. 29 at 10:30: "She Devils on Wheels" (1968, Herschell Gordon Lewis), with Ruby Tuesday. . . . ¶ Sept. 29-30 at 9: "The Leather Boys" (1966, Sidney J. Furie), with Rita Tushingham and Colin Campbell. . . . ¶ Oct. 3 at 7: A program of short films by Fernand Léger, Dudley Murphy, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray.

Donnell Library Center, 20 W. 53rd St. (621-0619)—Sept. 24 at noon: "Ye'elen" (1987, Souleymane Cissé; from Mali, in Bambara). . . . ¶ Sept. 24 at 6: "Sambizanga" (1972, Saran Maldoror; from Angola, in Portuguese). . . . ¶ Sept. 25 at 6: "Yaaba" (1989, Idrissa Oudraogo; from Burkina Faso, in Mooré). . . . ¶ Sept. 27 at noon: "Mapantsula" (1988, Oliver Schmitz; from South Africa, in English, Zulu, Sotho, and Afrikaans). . . . ¶ Sept. 27 at 2:30: "Zan Boko" (1988, Gaston Kabore; from Burkina Faso, in Mossi and French) and "Wend Kuuni" (1982, Kabore; from Burkina Faso, in Mossi and French). . . . ¶ Sept. 27 at 6: A program of short films from southern Africa. . . . ¶ Oct. 2 at noon: "The Maltese Falcon" (1941, John Huston), with Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, Sidney Greenstreet, Elisha Cook, Jr., and Peter Lorre. . . . ¶ Oct. 2 at 2:30: "The Cat and the Canary" (1927, Paul Leni; silent), with Creighton Hall and Laura La Plante.

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Oct. 3 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9:30: "Camille Claudel" (1988, Bruno Nuytten; in French), with Isabelle Adjani, Gérard Depardieu, Madeleine Robinson, and Alain Cuny.

IN BRIEF

SEE ABOVE FOR THEATRE ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS.

IF A MOVIE HAS BEEN REVIEWED IN "THE CURRENT CINEMA" DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS, THE DATE OF ITS REVIEW IS GIVEN.

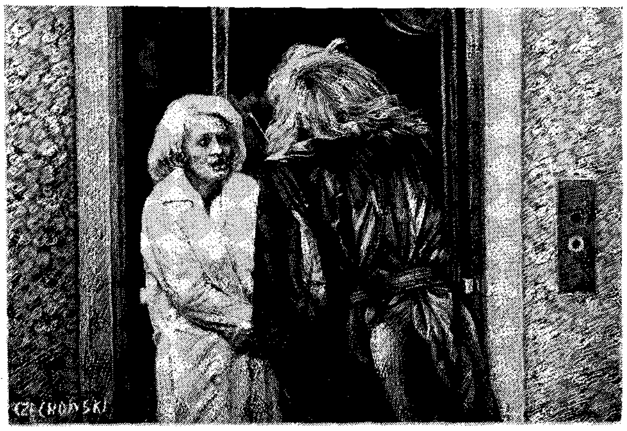
(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Terrence Rafferty.)

Akira Kurosawa's Dreams—Not one of its eight segments feels like a real dream. The kind of power that Kurosawa aims for, and intermittently achieves, in this picture is less oneiric than ceremonial. The film is a succession of sweeping dramatic gestures and lofty incantations performed in an atmosphere of hushed solemnity. The second half of "Dreams" is weak: the fifth episode, "Crows," about a fantasy encounter with van Gogh, is a thin conceit; and the remaining three segments are all static, self-conscious, and didactic. But there's greatness in the film's first hour. The opening segment, "Sunshine Through the Rain," is the vision of a small child who wanders into a forest and witnesses a wedding procession of foxes; the sequence has a wholly original sense of the rapturous fear and awe we feel when we first come upon the wonders of the natural world. The second episode, "The Peach Orchard," is also lovely (though its mood and pace are too similar to those of the first). The third segment, "The Blizzard," about four men trapped in a snowstrom, is all snow, howling-wind effects, and bleak, undifferentiated vistas of despair, until Kurosawa pulls a miracle out of the white void; a woman in long black hair and diaphanous robes appears to the party's leader as he battles sleep. It's a transcendent image, perhaps the most piercing ever made of the desires that keep people from surrendering to death. And the fourth episode, "The Tunnel," about a man returning from war and encountering his dead comrades, is a brilliant, hypnotic piece of filmmaking. Its images are simple, stark, and resonant, its dramatic shape is lucid and classically satisfying, and its rhythm is overwhelming, unstoppable; it moves with a sorrowful marching pace, the rhythm of grief. With Akira Terao, who plays the dreamer in six of the segments; Mieko Harada as the Snow Fairy; Martin Scorsese as van Gogh; and Chishu Ryu. Cinematography by Takao Saito and Masaharu Ueda. In Japanese.—T.R. (Reviewed in our issue of 9/10/90.) (Angelika Film Center, and 57th St. Playhouse.)

An American in Paris (1951)—The Academy Award-winning musical, directed by Vincente Minnelli, about a romance between an American painter (Gene Kelly) and a French girl (Leslie Caron). Too fancy and overblown (there's a ballet with scenes in the style of Dufy, Renoir, Utrillo, Rousseau, van Gogh, and Toulouse-Lautrec), but the two dancing lovers have infectious grins and the Gershwin music keeps everything good-spirited. The songs include "I Got Rhythm," "Embraceable You," and " 'S Wonderful," and Georges Guétary sings a spiffy arrangement of "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise." With Nina Foch as a rich, decadent American, and Oscar Levant thumping away happily on the piano. Written by Alan Jay Lerner; choreographed by Kelly; art direction by Cedric Gibbons and Preston Ames.—P.K. (Theatre 80 St. Marks; Oct. 3.)

Darkman—A comic-book movie made with real conviction. The director, Sam Raimi, works from inside the cheerfully violent adolescent-male sensibility of superhero comics, as if there were no higher style for a filmmaker to aspire to, and the absence of condescension is refreshing. The film's graphic style is all bright colors, high contrast, and skewed angles; its narrative style is breathlessly speedy; its emotions are basic (mostly greed and revenge); and its dialogue is so crude and punchy that you can practically see the exclamation point. The title character, played by Liam Neeson, is a worthy addition to the tradition of angelic-demonic avengers. Yet the picture isn't quite satisfying. Raimi has some terrific visual ideas, but his skills as a director are rather primitive. He doesn't have the technique to match his imagination, and frequently you find yourself reponding to the idea of a sequence rather than to the experience of it on the screen. The images and ideas in "Darkman" don't flow, don't carry us along with them, in the way a real filmmaker's would. Raimi has made a first-rate comic book without having made a genuinely exciting movie. Also with Frances McDormand, Larry Drake, and Colin Friels. The screenplay is by Chuck Pfarrer, Sam Raimi, Ivan Raimi, Daniel Goldin, and Joshua Goldin, from a story by the director.—T.R. (9/10/90) (Manhattan Twin, Waverly, Chelsea Cinemas, Worldwide Cinemas, Olympia, and National Twin.)

Dressed to Kill (1980)—One of the most sheerly enjoyable films of the eighties, this sophisticated horror comedy, written and directed by Brian De Palma, is permeated with the distilled essence of impure thoughts. Set in Manhattan, it's about sex and fear; De Palma presents extreme fantasies and pulls the audience into them with such apparent ease that the pleasure of the suspense becomes aphrodisiacal. Angie Dickinson shows a much warmer expressive range than might be expected as a beautiful, aging golden blonde, married yet frustrated, and longing to be made love to; Michael Caine brings fine, precise shadings of ambiguity to the role of her analyst; the breezy comedienne Nancy Allen is a pretty, investment-minded hooker who witnesses a murder; Keith Gordon is Dickinson's teen-age prodigy son, who builds computers; and Dennis Franz is a brash police detective. The music is by Pino Donaggio, the cinematography is by Ralf D. Bode, and the editing is by Jerry Greenberg.—P.K. (Theatre 80 St. Marks; Sept. 27.)



Angie Dickinson and the murderer in "Dressed to Kill"

Fat City (1972)—Set and shot in Stockton, California, this John Huston movie about boxing is almost a really memorable movie, but it suffers from a central piece of miscasting. Stacy Keach is catatonically drab as Tully, the boxer on the skids. The film is beautifully acted and directed around the edges, but it also suffers from a tragic tone that has a blurring, antiquing effect. You watch all these losers losing, and you don't know why they're losing or why you're watching them. Their losing appears to be a plot necessity for the sake of a faded idea of classical structure. In the role of a nice, dumb young fighter, Jeff Bridges helps to compensate for the missing center. He doesn't have much chance for characterization, but the way he moves is so unobtrusively natural and right that you feel you know the kid and understand him. Curtis Cokes, a fighter who had never acted before, is remarkable as Earl. Also with the flamboyant Susan Tyrell as the drunken Oma, and Candy Clark, Art Aragon, and Nicholas Colosanto. The screenplay, by Leonard Gardner, is adapted from his novel; the cinematography is by Conrad Hall. With the song "Help Me Make It Through the Night," by Kris Kristofferson. Produced by Ray Stark; he later acknowledged he'd made a mistake in rejecting Huston's choice for Tully—Marlon Brando, who wanted to play the part.—P.K. (Theatre 80 St. Marks; Oct. 2.)

Flatliners—This head trip about life after death is staged and shot in a baroque, hallucinatory style, and it moves, but it's unbearably preachy. It's like a small-time Sunday-school lesson conducted in a vast haunted cathedral. Kiefer Sutherland, Julia Roberts, Kevin Bacon, William Baldwin, and Oliver Platt are the Chicago medical students who take part in experiments—stopping and then re-starting their hearts—and learn that in the afterlife they must do penance for the bad things they've done in this one. The picture doesn't even show a sense of humor about Baldwin's sins: videotaping his sexual exploits without getting the women's consent. (Oliver Platt's line readings provide the only entertainment.) The director, Joel Schumacher, seems too gifted (visually) to be working with this soggy screenplay, by Peter Filardi, and this swelling score, by James Newton Howard. The cinematography—heavy on fire and steam and cadavers—is by Jan De Bont; the production design is by Eugenio Zanetti. —P.K. (59th Street East Cinema, Chelsea Cinemas, and Worldwide Cinemas.)

The Freshman—This comedy, written and directed by Andrew Bergman, wears its zaniness on its sleeve. The hero, Clark (Matthew Broderick), is a quiet young man from Vermont who has just entered the N.Y.U. film school. Within a few days of arriving in New York, he's making deliveries for an "importer" named Carmine Sabatini (Marlon Brando) and being treated like a member of Sabatini's family (or Family): Carmine's daughter (Penelope Ann Miller) has told her father that she wants to marry Clark, and the old man embraces him, with alarming enthusiasm, as "the son I never had." The movie is overinsistent and very erratic. When Bergman's jokes are good, they're sensational; when they're not so good, he repeats them again and again, as if they'd become funnier through familiarity. In this picture he has actors who play his sort of material to perfection. Miller and Bruno Kirby, as Carmine's fast-talking weaselly nephew, are hilariously unfazed by the family's criminal activities, and Broderick calibrates his reactions with remarkable comic dexterity. And Brando seems to be in a bizarre and wonderful world of his own. People in the movie keep staring at him and commenting on his resemblance to Don Corleone, and he plays along, parodying himself marvellously. In his scenes the movie seems less frantic; its lunacy takes on an air of serenity—a deeper, more inexplicable, and much funnier weirdness. Also with Paul Benedict, Maximilian Schell, B. D. Wong, and Bert Parks (belting out "Tequila" and Dylan's sardonic "Maggie's Farm" at a formal dinner).—T.R. (7/30/90) (Gemini, and 23rd St. West Triplex. . . . ¶ Worldwide Cinemas; through Sept. 27.)

Ghost—It sounds like a horror movie, but it's a romantic fairy tale. The scariest thing about it is its shamelessness. A young New York bank executive, Sam (Patrick Swayze), is killed, on the street, at a moment in his life when everything seems to be going his way. After his death, Sam sticks around, as a spirit (and Swayze stays on screen, as a body). He attends his funeral; watches his beautiful girlfriend, Molly (Demi Moore), drift grief-stricken through the spectacular loft they had just moved into; and then devotes himself to protecting her from the people who killed him. Through a reluctant psychic (Whoopi Goldberg), he tries to communicate with Molly; later, an experienced ghost (Vincent Schiavelli) teaches him how to move objects and break stuff. In this movie, death is treated as if it were merely a form of disability, one of those handicaps we've seen people struggle bravely with in TV movies—something for the individual to triumph over, with will power, hard work, and love. This creamy-toned fantasy, directed by Jerry Zucker from a screenplay by Bruce Joel Rubin, certainly pushes the audience's emotional buttons. It's a twentysomething hybrid of "It's a Wonderful Life" and some of the goofier, more solemn episodes of "The Twilight Zone," and there's not a trace of wit or irony in it. Its images of death have a soothing banality, like a greeting-card message from the world beyond. Also with Tony Goldwyn and Rick Aviles.—T.R. (7/30/90) (Loews 19th Street East 6, Loews 34th Street Showplace, Loews Tower East, and Loews Paramount. . . . ¶ Art Greenwich Twin; through Sept. 27.)

Gilda (1946)—The story is turgid, melodramatic nonsense, but Rita Hayworth is at her most sexy-masochistic, and does a knockout of a fully dressed striptease as she sings "Put the Blame on Mame." (It's Anita Ellis's voice we hear.) With Glenn Ford and George Macready. Directed by Charles Vidor.—P.K. (Theatre 80 St. Marks; Sept. 28-29.)

GoodFellas—The director, Martin Scorsese, gives you a lift. He loves the Brooklyn organized-crime milieu, because it's where distortion, hyperbole, and exuberance all commingle. His mobsters are high on having a wad of cash in their pockets. The movie is about being cock of the walk, with banners flying and crowds cheering. Based on Nicholas Pileggi's nonfiction book "Wiseguy," it's a triumphant piece of filmmaking—journalism and sociology presented with the brio of drama. But the three major hoods, played by Ray Liotta, Robert De Niro, and Joe Pesci, don't have a strong enough presence, and the movie lacks the juice and richness that come with major performances. (It's like the Howard Hawks "Scarface" without Scarface.) What you respond to is Scorsese's bravura: the filmmaking process becomes the subject of the movie. Watching it is like getting strung out on pure sensation. Paul Sorvino as Paulie and Lorraine Bracco as Karen both come through, and Tony Darrow as a restaurant owner, Welker White as a drug courier who needs her lucky hat to make a coke delivery, and other performers in minor roles give the movie a frenzied, funny texture. The screenplay is by Pileggi and Scorsese; the cinematography is by Michael Ballhaus; the editing is by Thelma Schoonmaker.—P.K. (9/24/90) (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, Loews 19th Street East 6, Cinema I, 86th Street East Twin, Loews 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

Good News (1947)—One of the best of the lighthearted rah-rah collegiate musicals. The affable young Peter Lawford and goofy, blithe June Allyson are the leads and do the number "The French Lesson," by Comden and Green and Roger Edens; and Joan McCracken, with a gleeful look in her eyes, dances and sings the memorable novelty "Pass That Peace Pipe," by Edens and Ralph Blane and Hugh Martin. The rest of the score, including "The Varsity Drag," "Lucky in Love," and "The Best Things in Life Are Free," is from the original 1927 Broadway show by DeSylva, Brown, and Henderson (which was filmed once before, in 1930). This was the first film directed by the choreographer Charles Walters, and the first movie script by Comden and Green. The cast includes Mel Tormé, Ray McDonald, Patricia Marshall, Donald MacBride, Clinton Sundberg, Morris Ankrum, Tom Dugan, and Connie Gilchrist.—P.K. (Biograph Cinema; Sept. 30-Oct. 1.)

If I Were King (1938)—Lively costume romance. Ronald Colman smiles with mocking charm as the braggart poet François Villon, quick-witted with epigrams and swords. Fortunately, the script is by Preston Sturges. Frances Dee is the frosty great lady whom the poet melts (or thaws, anyway), and Ellen Drew is the warmer number, Huguette, an unkempt wench who hangs around the fellows in the wine cellars. With Basil Rathbone as a sly, wily Louis XI, and a first-rate cast, including Henry Wilcoxon, Bruce Lester, Alma Lloyd, Sidney Toler, Ralph Forbes, Montagu Love, and William Farnum. Frank Lloyd directed this version of Justin McCarthy's play, first filmed in 1920 starring William Farnum, then in 1926 starring John Barrymore, then in a musical version in 1930 starring Dennis King and Jeanette McDonald, and again (unsuccessfully this time) in 1955 starring Oreste Kirkop and Kathryn

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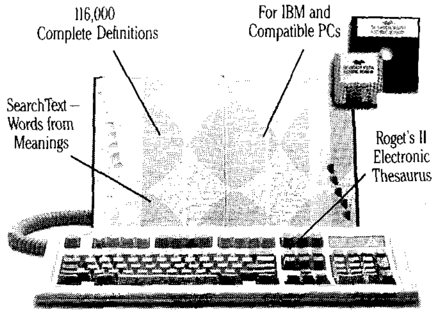

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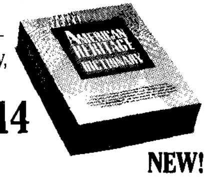

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Grayson.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; Oct. 2-3.)

May Fools—Louis Malle's new film takes place in May, 1968, when, for a few chaotic weeks, French society seemed on the verge of remaking itself: students were rioting, workers were striking, and the country came to a standstill. The characters in this picture are far removed from the stirring street theatre of May, '68, but they're affected by it nonetheless. The setting is a shabby estate presided over by Milou (Michel Piccoli), a genial man in his sixties who lives the life of a lazy country sensualist: he keeps bees, browns in the sun, and gropes the housekeeper. On the sunny day when the story begins, his mother dies, and he summons the rest of the family for the funeral and the reading of the will. There's a sense that things are about to change, both on the large scale of French society and on the infinitely smaller one of Milou's life. Malle and his co-writer, Jean-Claude Carrière, use the upheaval of May, '68, very deftly: it intrudes on their comedy like distant thunder on a sunny day, but the threatened downpour of Meaning never develops—we get a cooling shower of light ironies instead. Piccoli gives one of the best performances of his long career: he's vigorous and radiantly good-humored. Although its charm sometimes feels a bit too easy, the film is enjoyable throughout. It just bounces along to the rhythm of its remarkable score, composed and played by the eighty-two-year-old jazz violinist Stéphane Grappelli: the movie, like the music, has a delicate swing to it. Also with Miou-Miou and Michel Duchaussoy. In French.—T.R. (7/16/90) (Angelika Film Center.)

Mo' Better Blues—The hero of Spike Lee's film is a trumpet player named Bleek Gilliam (Denzel Washington), who is squarely in the tradition of obsessive, single-minded movie jazz musicians. Lee's script presents Bleek with a series of choices, about his love life, his artistic life, and the connections between them. The problem with the picture is that it doesn't frame the hero's choices so that we know what's at stake. And Lee doesn't seem to have thought through the role of the music. He has set the film in the present—in pointed contrast with other recent movies about jazz—but his attitude toward the music's relationship to contemporary culture is incoherent. The picture has a distracted, meandering quality. Denzel Washington's magnetism and intelligence keep the movie watchable even during its most aimless stretches, but the script doesn't allow him to shape the performance. Lee's filmmaking here is all notions and no shape: hard, fierce blowing, rather than real music. Also with Wesley Snipes, Joie Lee, Cynda Williams, Giancarlo Esposito, Dick Anthony Williams, John and Nicholas Turturro, and the late Robin Harris. Lee himself plays a comic lovable-sidekick role. The score is by Bill Lee (the director's father), and the music of Bleek's quintet is played by the Branford Marsalis Quintet, with Terence Blanchard as the trumpet soloist.—T.R. (8/13/90) (Criterion Center. . . . ¶ Chelsea Cinemas, and Metro Cinema; through Sept. 27.)

My Blue Heaven—Steve Martin wears a flattop pompadour. You see him and you laugh, and the movie's over.—P.K. (West Side Cinema.)

Presumed Innocent—A ponderous adaptation of Scott Turow's cunningly plotted mystery novel. The director, Alan J. Pakula, has shot and paced the movie as if it weren't a mystery but a serious character study, an art film. It's lit (by Gordon Willis) like "Cries and Whispers," only without the bright-red accents: the movie's palette seems to consist of brown and gray—earnest, business-suit colors. The lunacy of treating this story as a deep exploration of character is that the only thing we really want to know about the character in question—Rusty Sabich (Harrison Ford), a Midwestern prosecutor accused of murdering one of his colleagues (Greta Scacchi)—is: Did he do it or not? Ford, in what is probably an unplayable role, has to maintain a tense, repressed, impenetrable expression throughout. Bonnie Bedelia, as Rusty's nervous, self-deprecating wife, gives lovely shadings to a tough part. As the judge presiding over Rusty's trial, Paul Winfield supplies some sorely needed comedy. And Raul Julia, as the hero's lawyer, is an elegant, commanding presence in the courtroom scenes. Screenplay by Pakula and Frank Pierson.—T.R. (8/13/90) (Cinema II, Quad Cinema, 23rd St. West Triplex, Loews 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center. . . . ¶ 34th St. East; through Sept. 27.)

Pretty Woman—The lovers in this romantic comedy, directed by Garry Marshall, are a long-legged, golden-hearted Hollywood Boulevard hooker (Julia Roberts) and a cold, suave corporate raider (Richard Gere). He buys her tasteful (expensive) clothes and shows her how to act "classy"; she opens—in order—his wallet, his fly, and his heart. The only real distinction of this long and rather uneventful diversion is the radical contrast between the stars' performing styles. Roberts is all ebullience and scattershot charm. The kind word for Gere's style is minimal. He's opaque, stubbornly remote: he seems to have faxed his performance in. At its worst, the movie is just unimaginative; at its best, it's pleasant and competent. It's business-as-usual entertainment. Also with Jason Alexander, Laura San Giacomo, Ralph Bellamy, and Hector Elizondo. The screenplay is by J. F. Lawton.—T.R. (Guild.)

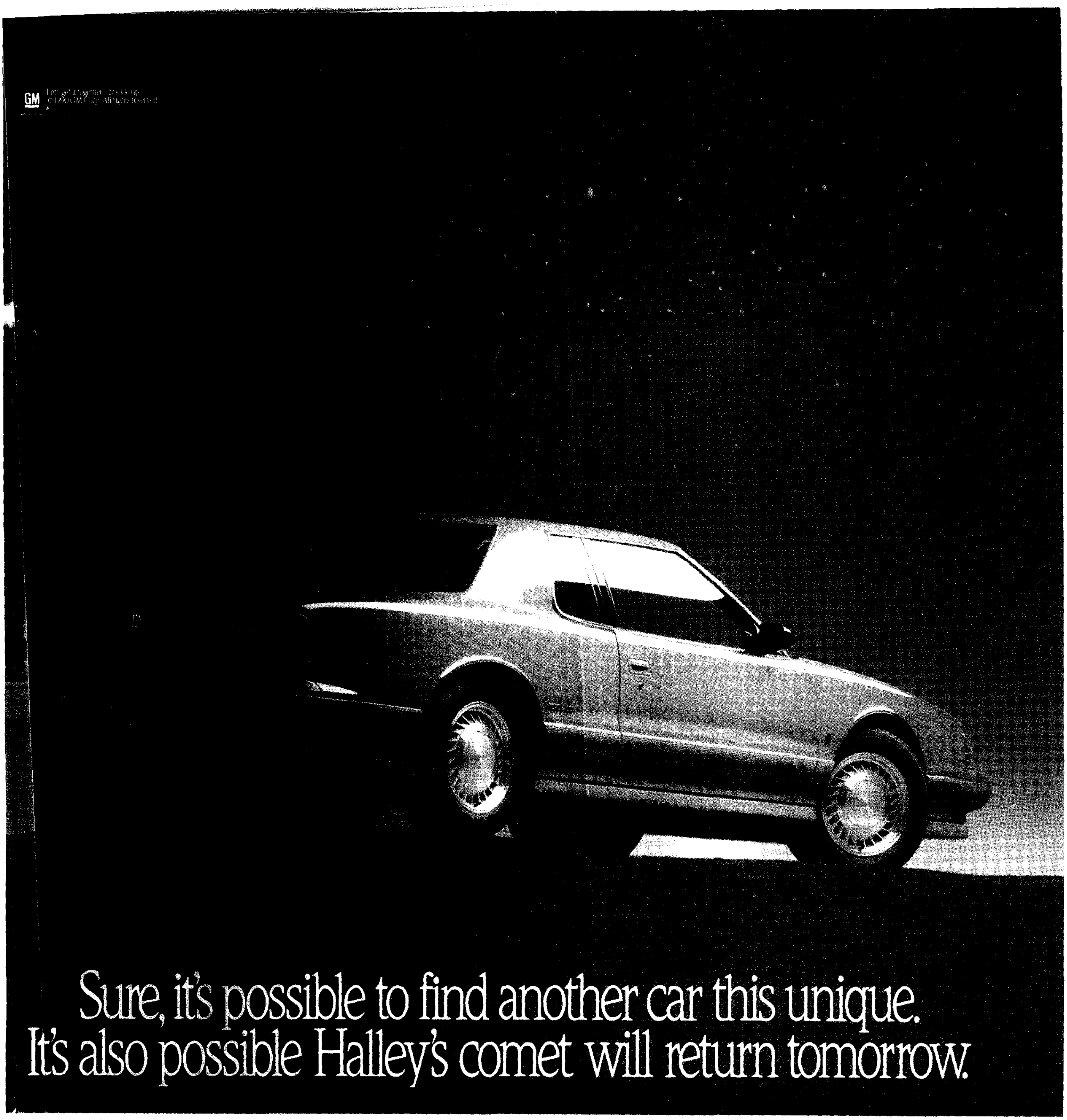
June Allyson and Peter Lawford in "Good News"

The Sound of Music (1965)—Set in Austria in 1938, this is a tribute to freshness that is so mechanically engineered and so shrewdly calculated that the background music rises, the already soft focus blurs and melts, and, upon the instant, you can hear all those noses blowing in the theatre. Whom could this operetta offend? Only those of us who, despite the fact that we may respond, loathe being manipulated in this way and are aware of how cheap and ready-made are the responses we are made to feel. We may become even more aware of the way we have been turned into emotional and aesthetic imbeciles when we hear ourselves humming the sickly, goody-goody songs. The dauntless scrubbed-faced heroine (Julie Andrews), in training to become a nun, is sent from the convent to serve as governess to the motherless Von Trapp children, and turns them into a happy little troupe of singers before marrying their father (Christopher Plummer). She says goodbye to the nuns and leaves them outside at the fence, and she enters the cathedral to be married. Squeezed again, and the moisture comes out of thousands—millions—of eyes and noses. Wasn't there perhaps one little Von Trapp who didn't want to sing his head off, or who screamed that he wouldn't act out little glockenspiel routines for Papa's party guests, or who got nervous and threw up if he had to get on a stage? The only thing the director, Robert Wise, couldn't smooth out was the sinister, archly decadent performance by Christopher Plummer—he of the thin, twisted smile; he seems to be in a different movie altogether. With Eleanor Parker, Richard Haydn, Peggy Wood, Anna Lee, and Marni Nixon. The music is by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II; the script, by Ernest Lehman, is based on the stage version by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse.—P.K. (Gotham Cinema; through Sept. 27.)

The Tall Guy—Jeff Goldblum as an American actor in London who has spent six years playing stooge to a detestably smug English comic (Rowan Atkinson) and has lost his confidence and most of his sex drive. Then this gangling wreck is cast as the lead in an Andrew Lloyd Webber-style version of "The Elephant Man"—"Elephant!" *the musical.* Directed by Mel Smith, from a script by Richard Curtis, this satire of the life of the theatre has a loose, inventive dottiness. Goldblum's wild-eyed sloppy good nature sets off Atkinson's lethal genius at playing an articulate swine, and the whole cast appears to be acting in clover. That includes Emma Thompson, who seems stripped down to pure flakiness, and Geraldine James as a nympho landlady, Hugh Thomas as a diphead doctor, Anna Massey as a gleaming smart agent, Kim Thomson as a curly-haired singer, and the insidious Peter Kelly as the smarmy mountebank who stages "Elephant!" Mel Smith turns up in several bits; he's the rubber-faced fellow who looks like a pixie Alfred Hitchcock.—P.K. (9/24/90) (Angelika Film Center, Gramercy, and Sutton.)

Wild at Heart—Right from the start, just about everything is wrong with David Lynch's new movie, and the wrongness has an escalating, vertiginous quality. Every false move seems to lead to another, more disastrous than the one before. It's a buzzing, hyperkinetic picture, but its wildness is all on the surface: the images are elaborately conceived, arresting, and meaningless, like tattoos. The novel by Barry Gifford on which Lynch based his screenplay is a languorous, arty trifle about a pair of lovers named Sailor (Nicolas Cage) and Lula (Laura Dern), who drive from North Carolina to Texas and stop at ratty hotels and motels along the way; they're hard-lovin' losers who smoke a lot and don't get to the place they set out for (California). Their happiness is threatened by a variety of kinky villains, mostly of Lynch's invention: Gifford's poky Deep South odyssey is now an orgy of evil, full of graphic violence and grotesque craziness. The shocks don't have much resonance, though; the weirdness here is inexpressive and trivial, even silly. And the lurid villainy always seems diversionary, a baroque disguise for a bland, lifeless, and overfamiliar story. The movie is one startling lapse of taste after another; it's a sorry spectacle. Also with Diane Ladd, Willem Dafoe, Harry Dean Stanton, Isabella Rossellini, Grace Zabriskie, J. E. Freeman, W. Morgan Sheppard, and Calvin Lockhart. —T.R. (8/27/90) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, and Cinema 3. . . . ¶ 62nd & Broadway; through Sept. 27.)

The Witches—The ads say "From the imagination of Jim Henson and director Nicolas Roeg." It would be more accurate to say "From the imagination of the writer Roald Dahl." This quirky fairy-tale movie is about the diabolical, gleeful evil that's hidden behind normality. (It's about women who secretly hate children.) What Henson and Roeg supply is their craftsmanship and their affection for the novel's adult, calmly macabre tone. (The movie promises to be an enduring, slightly scandalous joy.) As the Grand High Witch of the World, the black-clad Anjelica Huston lifts her arm up high in a towering salute and, addressing the witches of England at their annual meeting, held at a seacoast hotel, she outlines her plan: all the children in the land are to be turned into mice. The nine-year-old Luke (Jasen Fisher), who overhears her speech, is hunted down and transformed, but, blessed with a practical-minded Norwegian granny (Mai Zetterling) who's an expert on witches, he sets out to foil the plan. The movie doesn't have Dahl's narrative confidence, and it goes in for a little sweetening, but it has major compensations. Pale, bespectacled Luke is rather mousy to start with, and when he becomes a light-brown critter who can be cradled in his granny's hand it seems almost a fulfillment. His greedy pal Bruno (Charles Potter) seems fulfilled, too—as a blobby gray rodent. The two mice are triumphs for Henson's workshop. Zetterling is the hypnotic storytelling granny of our dreams; Huston is a gutsy, camp witch, with an accent that slips like her features; her terrified underlings—bald, drag-queen witches—are like a child's drawings of the Devil. With Bill Paterson and Brenda Blethyn as Bruno's parents, Rowan Atkinson as the hotel manager, and Jane Horrocks as Miss Irvine. The script is by Allan Scott; the exteriors were filmed in Bergen, Norway, and at the Headland Hotel, Newquay, Cornwall.—P.K. (Eastside Cinema, Quad Cinema, and West Side Cinema.)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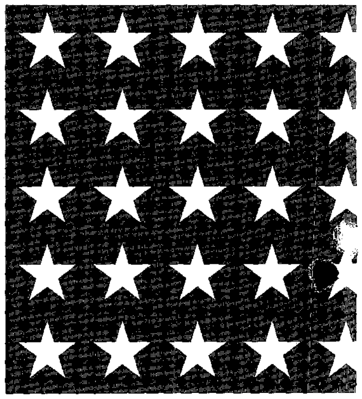

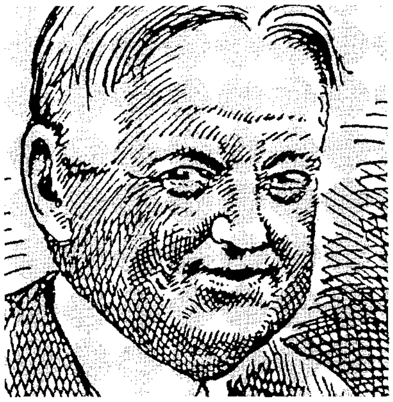

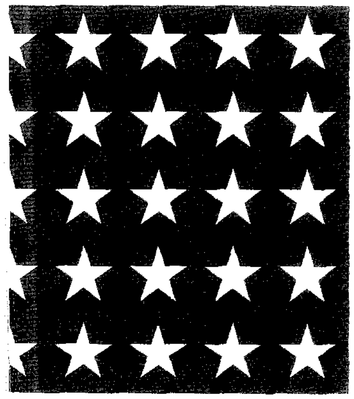

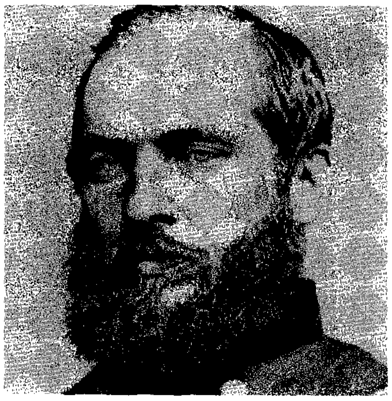

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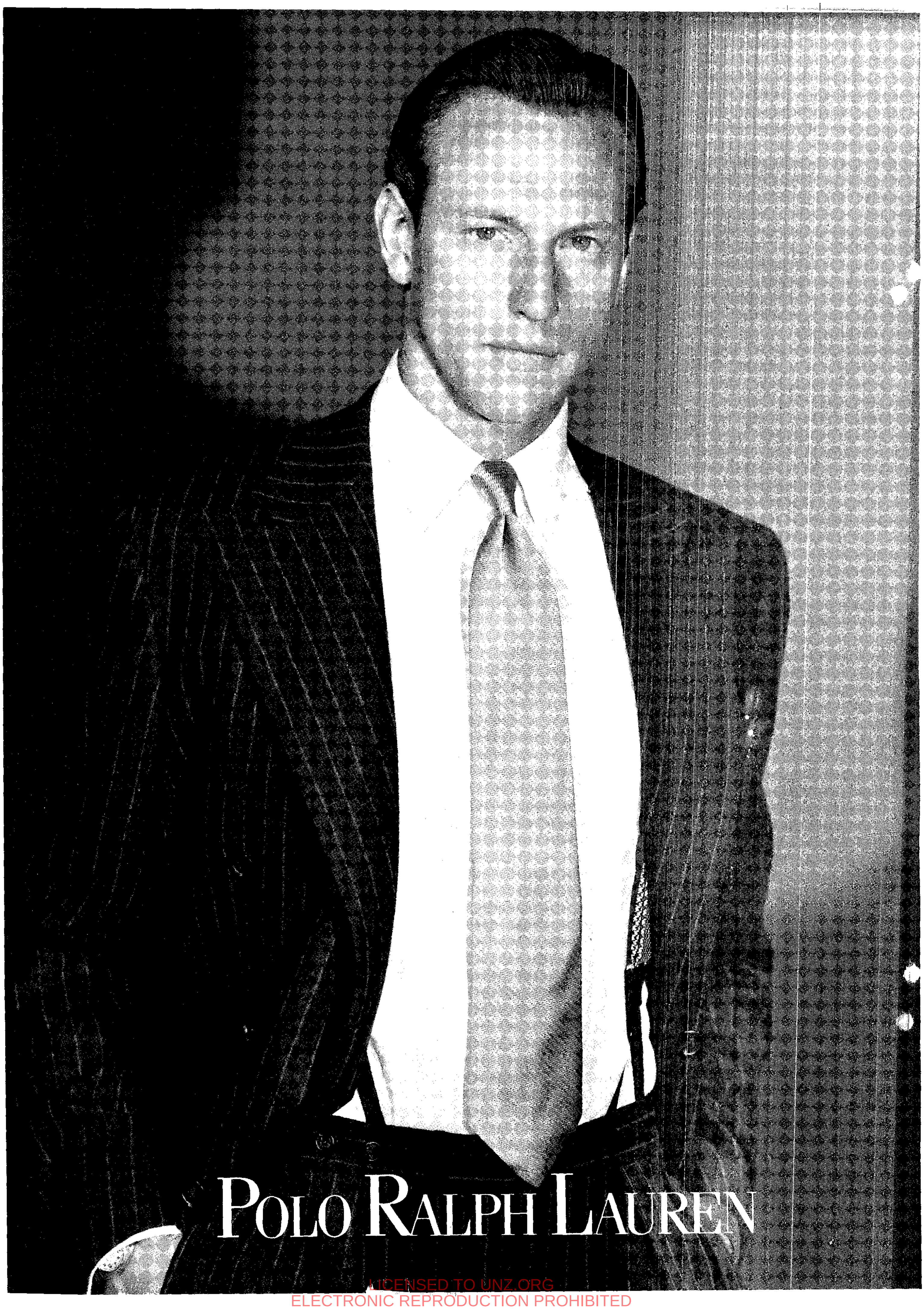
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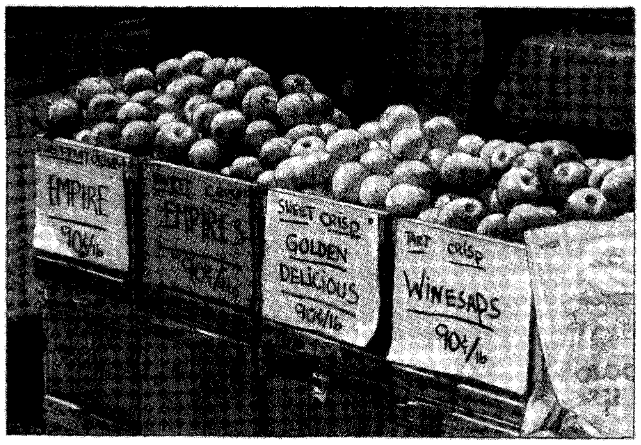
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Notes and Comment

THOUGH the rhetoric surrounding the Middle East crisis has softened somewhat since the threats of mid-August, the United States and Iraq remain caught in what President Mitterrand has called the "logic of war." However effective the United Nations embargo has been in interrupting Iraqi trade, there is no sign that it will soon achieve what President Bush has said is its major purpose: forcing Saddam Hussein to withdraw his troops unconditionally from Kuwait. Nor does the American buildup of more than a hundred and fifty thousand troops seem likely to intimidate Hussein into such a wholesale retreat. Various unnamed Administration sources have let it be known that this stalemate can continue only so long before, in President Bush's words, "additional steps" will be taken.

Our policy has thus acquired an inexorable, helpless quality. Our troops are there, and more are arriving every day, and at a certain point, if the Iraqis don't retreat, those troops must *do* something. Not for the first time, the exercise of American power has become imbued with a feeling of powerlessness. Present decisions seem to be pushed forward by the weight of past actions, and by the need to retain the "credibility" that those actions have already put at risk. Such is the logic of war.

Until recently, the fateful first link in this chain of logic had seemed to be Hussein's reckless decision to invade Kuwait, and his apparent failure to anticipate the response of the United States. Set against what we now know of American actions during the weeks before the invasion, however, his decision seems less the irrational act of a power-mad dictator than the bold step of a man who thought he had received a clear signal from the United States—a signal that if he wanted Kuwaiti territory he should go ahead and take it.



Iraq's claims on Kuwaiti land are long-standing, and have led to periodic crises. Tensions heightened in mid-July, when Iraq began threatening to use force against its neighbor and moved thirty thousand troops to the border. A week later, Hussein summoned April Glaspie, the American Ambassador to Baghdad, and forced her to endure what seems to have been a tirade, during which he made it clear that he felt free to use force not only against Kuwait but against the United States if it intervened. Ambassador Glaspie listened to these remarkably forthright threats (they included a strong hint that terrorism would be used), and she responded with an extraordinary assurance. "We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait," she told Hussein, and emphasized that this position would be stated publicly in Washington. (A few days later, Ambassador Glaspie's boss, Assistant Secretary of State John Kelly, told Congress that the United States was not bound by any treaty to come to Kuwait's defense.) Ambassador Glaspie also informed Hussein that she would soon be leaving Baghdad for "consultations" in Washington.

It's easy to see how the Ambassador's soothing words and her seemingly convenient departure, days before the invasion, together with the initially weak American response to the Iraqi troop movements, must have appeared to Hussein to constitute a "green light." Such a signal, after all, would amount to just the latest step in a decade-long policy of befriending Iraq—a policy that had begun with the strong American "tilt" toward Hussein's regime during the Iran-Iraq War and had continued with generous American trade credits to help the country rebuild its economy. It seems clear that, despite the regime's brutality and repressiveness—and despite its use of chemical weapons, which we now hear so much about—American policymakers saw Hussein as a possible replacement for the Shah of Iran as "policeman of the Gulf." "It was a choice between Hussein and the Ayatollah," Richard Murphy, the assistant secretary of state for Mideastern affairs under President Reagan, said recently. "It was that simple."

Unfortunately, it wasn't that simple. Not only was the aggressive character of Hussein's regime clear but so was the fact that Iraq's borders with Iran and with Kuwait were inherently unstable. In drawing up the modern Iraqi and Kuwaiti borders in the early nineteen-twenties, the

British deliberately deprived Iraq of a port on the Gulf, creating what has been a chronic cause of conflict in the region ever since; for example, it was largely to secure the Shatt-al-Arab waterway that Iraq attacked Iran in 1980. Now, if Iraq could intimidate Kuwait into relinquishing a small piece of largely uninhabited territory—a strip on the border, together with two islands, which had long been claimed by the Iraqis—then Iraq would be appeased, the conflict with Iran resolved, and the Gulf made more stable. And who would seriously support the Kuwaitis if they protested about surrendering a little bit of desert? This appears to have been the reasoning of American officials. As Ambassador Glaspie later remarked to the *Times*, "I didn't think—and nobody else did—that the Iraqis were going to take all of Kuwait."

American officials in the White House and the State Department continued to misjudge the Iraqis even when, five days before the invasion, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency presented what they considered definitive proof that tens of thousands of Iraqi troops and tanks were about to surge over the border. Only when those troops finally invaded did our officials accept the fact that Saddam Hussein had indeed decided to take all of Kuwait.

Apparently startled by the strong American reaction, Hussein said that President Bush had "gone crazy"; it certainly can be argued that *he* hadn't changed. In any case, American policymakers might have been expected to know by now that brutal protégés are famous for not doing precisely what their sponsors expect or want them to. And certainly they should know that all-powerful dictators, particularly those with claims on the land of rich, weak neighbors, are notoriously unmoved by international law—which President Bush now champions in public, although his diplomat seems to have neglected to mention it when she met with Hussein in private at a moment when a firm lesson, firmly delivered, on the integrity of national boundaries and the importance of the principle to the United States might have made a real difference. Instead, respect for international law was sacrificed to realpolitik. It was then that the logic of war began to unfold—the climax of a decade-long strategy in which we chose to link arms with Saddam Hussein. As a result of that strategy, American policy, and American lives, are today subject to the decisions of a foreign leader, who has pushed not only his back but ours to the wall.

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Dealer

Henry Feiwel, who thinks in pictures, pictures his own history as a series of arcs, rising and falling and then rising again. Mr. Feiwel, who recently opened a new art gallery on Fifty-seventh Street, had the good luck to be born, sixty-nine years ago, into a Viennese Jewish family that combined a love of art with the possession of a healthy garment business, but he had the bad luck to come of age just at the time of the Anschluss. Beginning again in America, in the nineteen-forties, Mr. Feiwel had the good luck to become a denim dealer at a time when, as he puts it, "denim was just about to rise from a thing worn by poor soldiers in the stockade and become the universal fabric of American life." He had the further good luck to find his prosperity coinciding with a high period in American art, and he was able to use the money he made selling denim to collect paintings and sculptures by many of the leading American abstract artists of his time. In the mid-eighties, when he liquidated his denim business, however, and opened a downtown art gallery—something he had always dreamed of doing—the art world changed abruptly, becoming an arena for buying cheap and selling dear which saw more brutality than any known to a denim dealer. But now he believes that a chance memory of his early years may have led him at last to his true vocation, and that his good luck has once again returned.

Henry Feiwel has gray hair, heavy black eyebrows, and a gentle, resonant Viennese-Jewish accent. "I can't remember when I first saw art, or what the first images were that mattered to me," he remarked the other day, sharing tea with a friend at his apartment, on Park Avenue. "Lately, I have been trying to recall which books were important to me as a child, which ones I responded to as images for life. There was Wilhelm Busch, of course—'Max und Moritz'—and then there was Karl May, the German author of that long series of books in which the Apaches were the heroes and the Comanches the villains. That was my first picture of America. A passion for art is very nearly the strongest emotion I have possessed since childhood. It is tied in with ideas about joy, and about love. I know that the first things I collected were nineteenth-century topographic prints of New York City." One of the prints—a hand-tinted view of Broadway seen from Canal Street in 1836—now hangs in Mr. Feiwel's apartment, surrounded by Stellas and Kellys. "It means a lot to me still, that picture," he went on. "I was closing a deal with a millowner, and I told him that I was very excited, because I was going to be able to use the profits from the deal to buy a print. He was so pleased that someone he thought of, no doubt, as a rather comic foreigner was buying American scenes that he gave me a discount of a penny to the yard, so that he could finance the purchase."

Sometime in the early sixties, Henry Feiwel wandered into the Sidney Janis Gallery on Fifty-seventh Street, and discovered hard-edge abstraction. "A world opened up to me," he said. "That whole generation of American artists and sculptors—Stella and Kelly and Mark Di Suvero and George Rickey! There was a quality to their work that I had been searching for for a long time. There was austerity in it, and joy, too—the confidence of people making strong, simple statements. You could still buy good pieces for a few hundred dollars, and then, a little later, for a few thousand, and so I did."

Mr. Feiwel's enthusiasm for American abstraction and the world's appetite for American denim grew together, and by the end of the decade he had been able to acquire an exceptional collection of American paintings, most of which he kept quietly—almost secretly—in his Manhattan apartment. "It was very much a family thing," he said. "One of the earliest memories that my children have is my calling to them as they played, 'Watch the Kelly! Watch out for the Kelly!' "

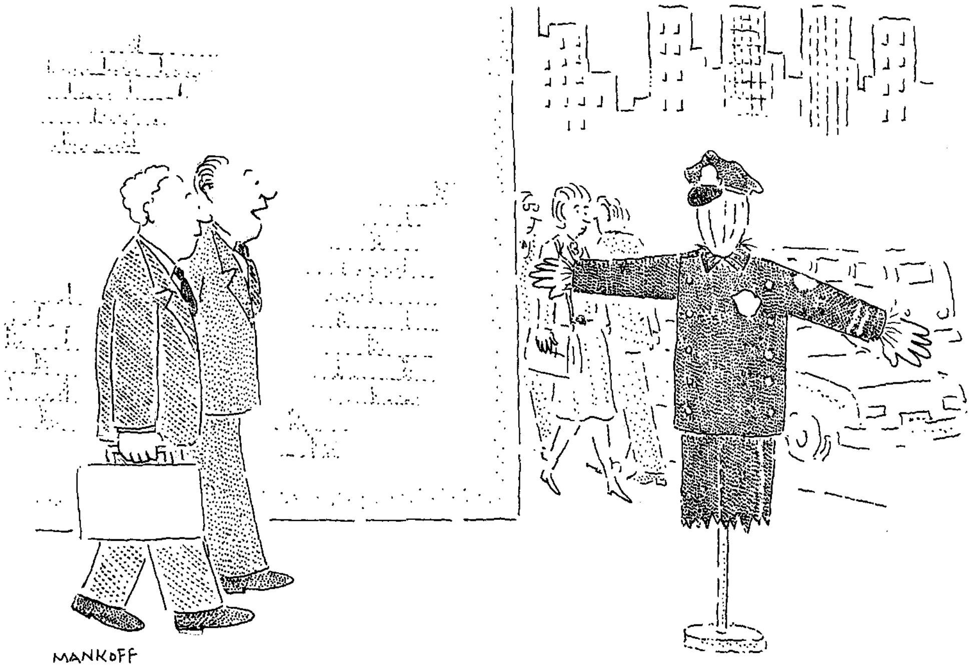
In 1988, Mr. Feiwel decided to open a downtown gallery. "I decided that I would lose as much money as was necessary in order to show young artists of quality and refinement, and create shows that made complex points about the relationships between new art and old art," he said. "But I discovered that these matters were of no interest to the art world. I discovered that most young artists disliked art and were fascinated by commodities—*liked* being treated as manufacturers of goods."

Disillusioned, Mr. Feiwel made plans to close the gallery. But then an enthusiasm that had been on the fringe of his attention for a long time came to its center. "I was thinking about my childhood, and about the pleasure Busch had given me," he recalled. "And then I thought about my children's childhood, and I realized that there was a whole genre of art that I loved and that was simply waiting to be explored. I thought, Why not a gallery for this? And why not on Fifty-seventh Street?"

The new Henry Feiwel Gallery, which opened at 24 West Fifty-seventh on September 25th, will show only the illustrations of children's books. "I had been looking at children's books for a number of years," he said the other day. "They reminded me of the time when I had young children of my own, of course, and at first I thought that this was merely a sort of nostalgia, a sentimentality. Then I thought, But this is a sentimentality I *like*, a nostalgia that opens the door again to joy."

Mr. Feiwel is prepared for the new gallery, like the previous one, to be a strict, no-apologies money-losing proposition, but he thinks that the children's-book illustrators may be able to accept his generosity more easily than the downtown artists did. "These are all established artists, successful artists—they don't need to think in terms of a Big Idea," he said. "They have money, steadiness, and that gives them freedom. They think in terms of books sold, not drawings bought. A gallery devoted to children's art cannot work commercially—certainly not on Fifty-seventh Street. I have budgeted for a loss, a substantial loss, and if I can reduce my loss a little I will consider my gallery a howling success. All I want is personal confirmation that this is right. All I want is confirmation that this is something worth looking at."

Mr. Feiwel's stable of children's-book illustrators does not include any obvious stars. Instead, he has conscientiously scoured library journals, and has haunted children's-book stores and signed up artists who appeal to him. "Right now, I am most excited by the work of Bruce Degen," he said. "Do you know his work? He is the illustrator of the Miss Frizzle series. I am particularly taken with his drawing of Miss Frizzle's shoes. They open up vistas. I hope to do group shows, individual shows, shows that bring together the best work of the nineteenth century with the best work of our time. Then, finally, if the ground has been prepared, I will add my abstractions, too. It sounds like a comical thing, I know, but I can see Frank Stella and Bruce Degen hanging together in my gallery. A peaceable kingdom, everybody inside."



"Great, but where are they going to get the money to pay for them?"

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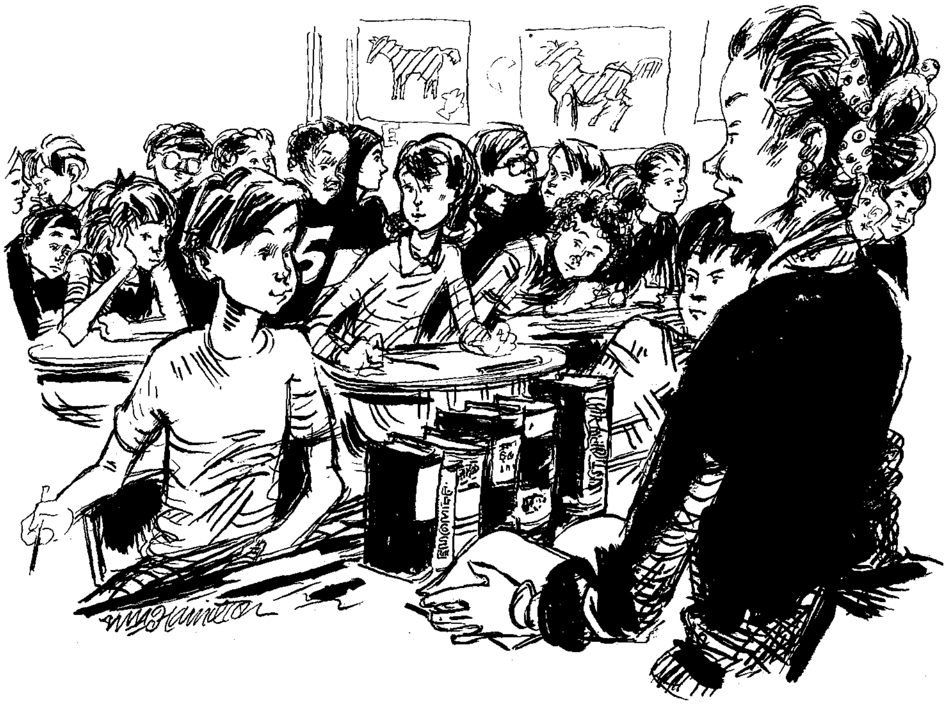
Mr. Trenton

THERE have always been close—even uncanny—correspondences between the history of Atlantic City and the modern history of gambling. And, similarly, there are a host of connections between gambling and the ballet: Diaghilev's yearly seasons at Monte Carlo, the Balanchine-Stravinsky production of "Jeu de Cartes," the poker game in "Billy the Kid," and the booking of ballet companies into the Brooklyn Academy of Music, which is barely a mile away from a major Brooklyn bingo parlor. Once you open yourself to this kind of thinking, a trip to the Sands Hotel, Casino & Country Club in Atlantic City to see a classical-ballet company from Moscow in the Copa Room seems no stranger than running down to your local bodega for some designer water and a Lotto ticket.

We took a trip to the Sands one recent Sunday for a matinée of the Russian Ballet of Moscow, a company of forty-six dancers, directed by the former Bolshoi star Vyacheslav Gordeyev. The company was completing the second, and final, leg of its full 1990 United States tour, and we happened to get a look at the souvenir program for the tour's first stop, in Trenton; this featured a letter by Joan Haberle, the Secretary of State, welcoming the company to New Jersey and reminding the reader that Trenton and Moscow's Lenin District maintain a sister-city relationship—"one that is continually enhanced by Trenton businessman and philanthropist, Mr. Shelley M. Zeiger." Mr. Zeiger is the producer who arranged for the Russian Ballet's appearance. On another page we learned that he is not only an experienced impresario but a man whose application of "considerable energy and imagination to the revitalization of New Jersey's capital" has earned him the nickname Mr. Trenton.

As we watched the show in A.C., Mr. Trenton was never far from our mind. First of all, by booking the Russian Ballet, with its fairy-tale repertory, into the Sands between September 12th and 27th, he had managed an incredible feat of timing, to synchronize with Harrah's, where Franz Harary's MagicQuest was playing through September 30th. He also made possible some unforgettable moments in ballet history, as when a man next to us, affected by the sight of Bournonville's Sylph running on her points in pas couru, put down his drink and said out loud, "I *like* that move!" In fact, most of the crowd seemed to like most of the moves, and at the end many people gave the group a standing ovation. "Look at that!" a woman sitting in a high roller's comp seat said to her companion during the encores. "I *am* looking!" her companion shouted back. Mr. Trenton did all this for South Jersey, and he did it his way.

The next day, we called up Shelley Zeiger's office, at Zeiger Enterprises, in the hope of getting in touch with Mr. Trenton himself. His communications director, Marjorie S. Schkolnick, explained that Mr. Zeiger was meeting with some state fathers in preparation for one of his many trips to the Soviet Union, and she offered us a rundown on his story, as a substitute. Since 1975, Mr. Zeiger has been importing gifts and collectibles from the Soviet Union—perfume, amber, nesting dolls, Khokhloma wooden lacquerware, and, as Ms. Schkolnick put it, "other tchotchkes." On one of his trips, in 1985, he met the mayor of Moscow's Lenin District, and, in response to Mr. Zeiger's interest in expanding trade between Moscow and Trenton, the mayor proposed the sister-city idea. One thing led to another, and soon Mr. Zeiger was angling to bring the Kirov Ballet to dance in Trenton. "They told him, 'Forget about it,' " Ms. Schkolnick said. Mr. Zeiger persevered, however, and in 1986 he brought to Trenton a contingent of the company, which was then performing in Philadelphia. "Seeing the Kirov here was a dream," Ms. Schkolnick said. "The Kirov performs in America like Brigadoon—it materialized, a mirage, in Trenton. After that, a lot of Russian producers called Shelley, and that's how he met up with Slav Gordeyev. And Gordeyev was so enthusiastic about performing here that in 1987 his company, then called the Moscow Classical Ballet, did a free performance for a Trenton soup kitchen. All you had to do to see them was bring a couple of cans of food. The place was jammed—forget about S.R.O. It was S.R.O. back to Princeton. Yes, Gordeyev is a wonderful man—he's truly in synch with Shelley." Suddenly, Ms. Schkolnick interrupted herself. "Wait, there's Shelley on the other phone." She disappeared for a moment, and then returned. "Wow! He was on the cellular phone and he turned a corner," she told us. "I almost lost him."



"Very good, Gary: 'A hero is a celebrity who did something real.'"

We asked what had led Mr. Trenton to produce the Russian Ballet at the Sands, and Ms. Schkolnick said that he has business connections with that establishment. She went on to tell us that she has written many articles about Mr. Zeiger's business connections over the years, and as she began to recall them she used the word "zeigerizing": "I didn't get a column out of it—all I got was a zeigerizing." We asked her what this meant, and she explained that the term was coined by John Anastasio, a former executive director of the Greater Trenton Symphony Orchestra. "He told me that 'zeiger' is now a verb," she said. "It means to sit down, to schmooze. To really get things done."

At the Plaza

WE were standing in a big crowd of people in the Edwardian Room recently when we overheard the following conversation behind us:

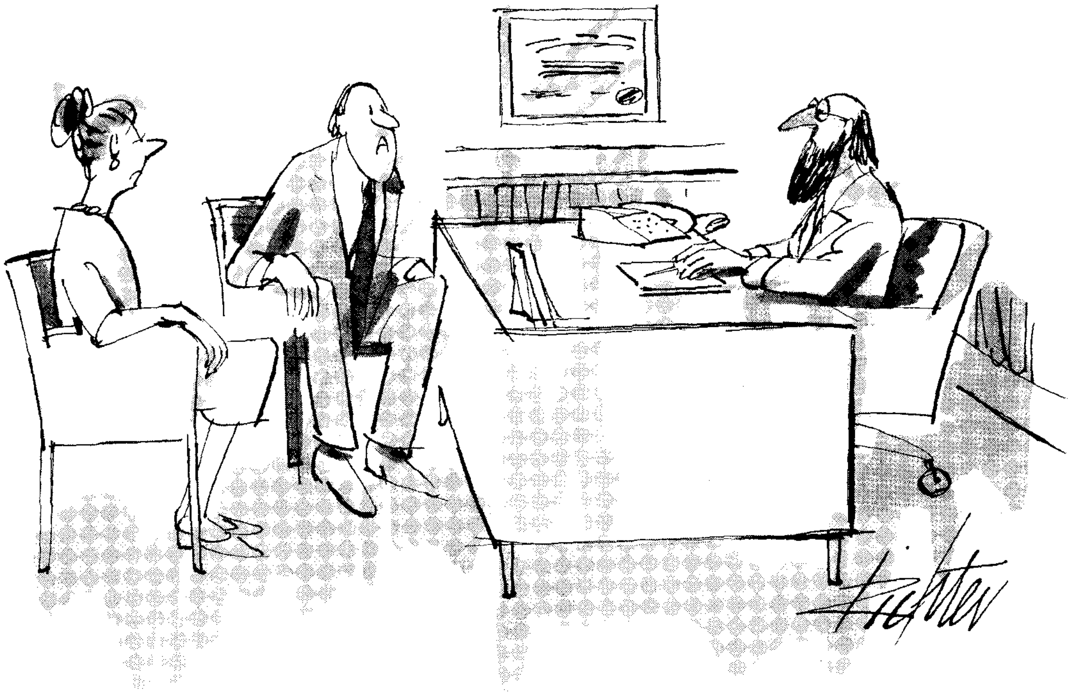
"When I was just a girl, I would have breakfast in the Edwardian Room right where we are now, and it would be just a banana cut up and milk. *That* was crazy." This from a woman.

And then this from a man: "Well, in the Grand Ballroom here once I was one of *two* escorts a girl from Mount Kisco took to the Junior Assemblies, which was the best débutante party, we thought." He kept on going. "And then in the Terrace Room, about five years after that, there was a party for Procol Harum, the rock group. Remember them? 'A Whiter Shade of Pale,' and so forth? They had a party for an album of theirs called 'Grand Hotel.' "

"That was appropriate."

"And a long time ago." The man paused. "Chip Monck was there. Remember Chip Monck? Who was the m.c. at Woodstock?"

Then a man put his hand out right in front of us, but not *at* us. "Hello, I'm your host, Lester Geist, and this is Mrs. Geist," the man said, but not to us. It was Donald Trump he was speaking to. Mr. Trump said hello and walked straight ahead. A pianist was playing "Love Walked In." In the distance, Martina Navratilova, Chris Evert, Billie Jean King, and Linda Evans were standing together. They were there because Ms. Navratilova, who has had many reasons to be satisfied with herself, has not until now been happy with the sportswear bearing her name. Now she *is* happy. She has changed companies—to one bearing Mr. Geist's name—and at the moment in the Edwardian Room which we are discussing she was happy. She was surrounded by friends. The atmosphere was crackling with satisfaction. After all, Americans have a right to be happy with the sportswear they endorse. This is a citizenship issue.



"She can forgive Nixon, but she can't forgive me."

Mrs. Geist turned to us, holding up the hand she had used in shaking Mr. Trump's. "I'll never wash it," she said.

"Wrong," said Mr. Geist. "*He* will never wash *his*." Mr. Geist, who is a handsome, fit-looking man in later middle age, was the first person to tell us that Martina Navratilova had been unhappy with her sportswear line. (Later on, Ms. Navratilova said it herself.) He also told us that Herman Geist sportswear had been in business since 1926—a long time for a sportswear firm. "The average sportswear firm is in business for three years," Mr. Geist said.

Longevity may have been a factor in Ms. Navratilova's thinking, too. "I hope this sportswear line lasts forever," she said later.

The man and the woman behind us were still talking.

"Were there *Senior* Assemblies?" the woman asked.

"No," the man said.

"Maybe these are the Senior Assemblies," the woman said.

There was, it has to be noted, a post-débutante atmosphere to the gathering. Ms. Evert, Ms. King, Ms. Evans, and Ms. Navratilova constituted a kind of receiving line, but what they were receiving wasn't clear. They were lit up most of the time, by lights for cameras. They were happy talking to one another, it seemed, but they were a little hard to reach. We Americans are still evolving our rituals, and one that conveys the gestalt "Happy at last with my line of sportswear" is still a work in progress.

There was a climax. There was a small stage set in the southwest corner of the Edwardian Room, and on the stage were two striking-looking women in tennis outfits, both blond, both wearing sunglasses. It would have been crude to assume that these young women were wearing anything other than the new Herman Geist-produced Martina Navratilova sportswear. This much of the ritual is in place. At a certain moment, the stage came alive, as it were, and Ms. Navratilova made the briefest and most gracious of announcements. It was as though Hope Cooke had given a party to say that she was glad to be back in the States after her fling in Sikkim, or— Well, we kept thinking of Rita Hayworth or Ava Gardner. "Thank God for Lester Geist. What ever made me think I could be happy with a trumpet player?"—it had that kind of energy.

Then, just when we thought it was all over, came the best part. Everyone—almost everyone—turned away from the stage. Ms. Navratilova had left the stage, you see. But the two models, wearing the actual sportswear itself, stayed on. We watched them. They stayed perfectly still, in tennis-playing poses. And then they *moved*. They must have been taking mime classes, because they moved beautifully, in perfect, amusing little subtle-as-you-please ways. And then, while they were both moving in these pleasing ways, they began to talk. The model on the left was trying to find out something important. Then she gave up and got down from the stage. What she had been trying to find out was the time. It was almost seven, and she had to leave. We stayed a while longer, to look at the model on the right. She held a racquet in one hand and a ball in the other. We tried to keep track of one of the series of mock-mechanical moves she made. Here it is: racquet back, head right, ball-holding hand still; pivot left, ball-holding hand up and down; feet flat, racquet back on shoulder; head left, racquet down, pivot right, ball hand rocking.

And that's not all. Once outside, we walked north on Fifth Avenue. At the Arsenal, we stopped, because we saw a group of people. On the steps of the Arsenal were two Australian Aborigines—that's what they looked like. One was beating two sticks together, and the other was blowing a big horn. They were almost naked. It was like the two models in a way. A well-dressed young man came up to us and said, "Welcome to the party!"

IN THE PLAIN AIR

While Manet painted the Monet family, Renoir painted beside him and Monet worked nearby. Monet painted Renoir at his easel (present location unknown), while Renoir, like Manet, painted Madame Monet, Jean Monet, and the rooster (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). Monet later recalled that as Renoir painted, Manet glanced at his canvas from time to time, and at one point the older artist walked over to Monet and whispered: "He has no talent at all that boy! You, who are his friend, tell him please to give up painting."—*Label to "The Monet Family in Their Garden," by Édouard Manet, in the Metropolitan Museum.*

A SUBURBAN summer afternoon at Argenteuil. A garden: willows, hyacinths, a privet hedge. Beyond the hedge, walls of the bicycle works, twin smokestacks with plumes of smoke blowing at identical angles. To the south, a field filled with haystacks, probably left over from last year, and to the west, past the lane, a hillside sloping gently to the sea.

MANET, MONET, *and* RENOIR *are setting up easels, uncapping and sniffing tubes of paint, flicking brushes across their thumbs, etc.*

MADAME MONET *fusses with young* JEAN, *arranging his collar. He squirms.*

The ROOSTER *struts nervously nearby.*

RENOIR: Now, allow me to understand. Monsieur Manet paints Monsieur Monet—

MONET: After painting first Madame Monet, my wife.

REN.: Ah, yes, your wife, and also your charming infant—

MANET: And the rooster.

MON.: That goes without saying.

REN.: And, Claude, you paint me—

MON.: If you have no objections.

REN.: Certainly not. You wish to paint me at my easel?

MON.: Of course.

REN.: Who, then, should I paint?

MONET *and* RENOIR *look at each other. Then both turn to look at* MANET.

MAN.: Absolutely not! I forbid it!

MON.: Please, Édouard, it only seems fair.

REN.: Oh, but the symmetry—you paint the Monets, Claude paints me, I paint you—perfect!

MAN.: Nobody paints Manet. (*He hunches over his canvas and begins to sketch in some outlines.*)

REN.: But, but—

MAN.: You may paint Madame and the child, as I am doing.

RENOIR *looks at* MONET. MONET *shrugs.*

REN.: Very well. Monsieur Manet paints Madame and the child, who have no objection to the procedure, and Monsieur Monet paints me, who am similarly inclined, while I, in turn, following the lead of the distinguished Monsieur Manet, paint, to the best of my ability, a second, though one hopes not inferior, portrait of the family Monet.

MAN. (*without looking up*): Shall we begin?

RENOIR *places his easel and stool a few feet from* MANET, *facing* MADAME MONET *and* JEAN. MONET *moves his easel where he can see* RENOIR. *They begin to paint.*

Humming tunelessly, RENOIR *selects a brush and makes a few passes at his canvas. Still humming, he sights along his thumb at* MADAME MONET. *Then, slowly, he moves his thumb until he is sighting at* MANET.

MAN.: What are you doing? I made it clear that you are not to depict me in any way.

REN.: Sorry, sorry.

They continue in silence. The ROOSTER *pecks at a grasshopper; it jumps away from him. He chases it; it jumps away again. He catches it and throws it in the air with his beak.*

REN. (*to* MAN.): Did you see? Remarkable!

MANET *snorts derisively.*

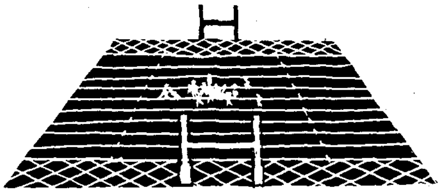
MON.: Auguste, could you turn this way just a bit? . . . Just a bit more, if you don't mind. A bit more. . . . Good! Just like that. Look like you're painting.

REN.: That is what I am trying to do, if you will allow me.

MON.: Just another moment. Good. Now you may relax.

MME. MON.: There is cider, if anyone should wish.

MAN.: No. Please hold your pose.



REN.: I have a tremendous thirst, myself. I have been perspiring like a swine.

MAN.: But we have been sitting here for less than a quarter of an hour.

MON.: We shall have the cider a little later, my dearest.

REN. (*under his breath*): Sheesh! (MANET *works intently, peering around his canvas and then painting with his brush held close to his face.* RENOIR *makes a few dabs at his canvas, then leans back on his stool to view the result.*) Ah, yes. (*He makes another few dabs, leans back again.*) Ah, *yes!* Just so! (*Another few dabs.*) Oh-h-h-h-h, *yes!* That's it. That is IT! (*Another few dabs.*) Oh, now you are working. Yes! Now you are cooking! (*Another few dabs. Chuckling softly.*) Oh, yes! Very good! *Ver-y* good in-*deed!*

MAN.: WILL YOU PLEASE BE QUIET!

REN. (*startled, smudging his canvas*): Aaah! Now look what you made me do. Her eyebrow is like a giant sun.

MAN.: That is no concern of mine.

REN.: This will take forever to put right.

MAN.: You should have thought of that before.

REN.: I was minding my business.

The minutes pass. The leaves of the trees grow heavy with the torpor of midsummer. Several times, young JEAN *must be restrained by his mother from getting up and running away. We hear his plaintive "Maman."* RENOIR *sketches in a detail with a small brush, pauses, then scrapes it out with his palette knife.*

MON.: I heard an amusing story about van Gogh the other day. (RENOIR *sketches the detail again, shakes his head, again scratches it out.*) It seems van Gogh was walking down the street in Arles (RENOIR *scrapes at his canvas again with an exclamation of impatience.*) and you know how van Gogh looks with that hat he always wears— (RENOIR *scratches his head, furrows his brow, and tries the detail again.* MANET, *meanwhile, steals a quick glance at* RENOIR'S *canvas, then another one. Then he stares openly for a moment or two. Then he gets up from his stool and looks closer until he is leaning over* RENOIR'S *shoulder.*) So anyway (*laughing*), just as van Gogh was passing the bakery a Swedish man comes up to him—

Ren. (*suddenly seeing* Manet *behind him*): Chouf! Spread out!

Man.: That's not the way a chicken's feet go.

Ren.: Oh, really? Well, I am of the opinion that it is.

Man.: Excuse me, but I can assure you that it is not.

Ren. (*rising, with fists clenched*): Why, for two francs I'd—

Man.: You'd what?

Mon.: Édouard, Auguste, please! Calm yourselves!

Renoir *and* Manet *stand nose to nose for a few seconds. Then, slowly, they back off.* Renoir *turns away from* Manet *with dignity, sits down, resumes painting.* Manet *walks over to* Monet.

Mon.: So, anyway, to return to my story about van Gogh—the Swedish man, noticing van Gogh's hat, remarks (*unintelligible Swedish accent*)—

Man. (*whispering, gesturing behind his hand at* Renoir): He has no talent at all that boy! You, who are his friend, tell him please to give up painting.

Ren. (*leaps to his feet*): I heard that!

Renoir *spits in his palms, scrapes his feet on the ground, and rushes at* Manet.

Blackout. *Sounds of a scuffle. The* Rooster *squawks frantically.*

T*HE lights come up to reveal the three painters once again at their easels.* Manet *holds a large beefsteak over one eye.* Renoir *has an ice bag on his right hand, and is painting with difficulty with his left.* Monet's *coat is in tatters.*

Madame Monet *and* Jean *are seated in the same pose as before.*

Man.: I am sure I will have a shiner.

Ren.: My hand is throbbing as if I had hit a marble column.

Man.: You may expect to receive my doctor's bill.

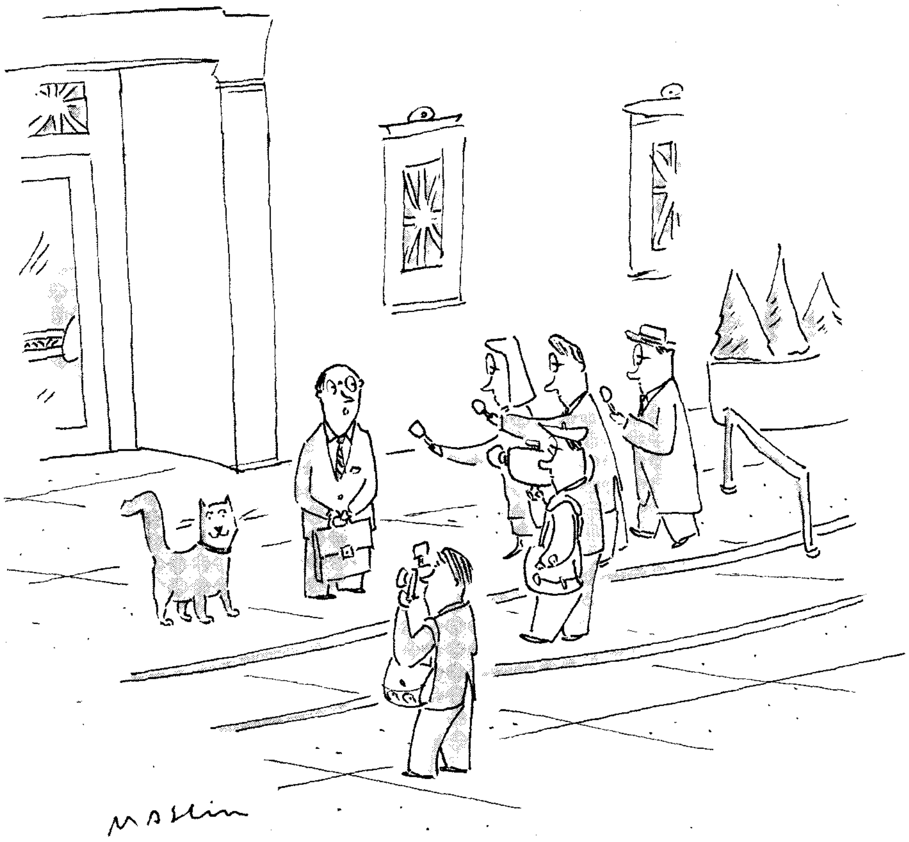
Ren.: And you may count upon a call from my attorney.

Man.: I see that you paint just as skillfully with this hand as you did with the other.

Ren.: Your antipathy is like a tonic to me.

Man.: Take my advice, you are wasting your time.

Ren.: The public will revere my name long after it has given up trying to tell which is you and which is Claude.



"My client looks like the cat that ate the canary—but, as far as I know, that, in this or any other state, is not a crime."

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Man.: Your name will not outlive you by one second.

Mon.: And which of *you*, may I ask, plans to pay my tailor's bill, or for the damage to my hedge?

A silence, unbroken except for the faint scratching of the brushes.

Tableau.

Monet *comes forward and addresses the audience.*

Mon.: This, then, was Impressionism. What delight when the works identified with that name first began appearing everywhere in the galleries and salons, like a limpid tide overflowing the crumbling levees of the past! But behind the surface of the pictures—what malice, what bile, what violence! Did the admirers who stood rapt before these works suspect that the hands that held the brushes could also hit, pinch, slap, tweak, and give stinging nose-flappers?

Perhaps you wonder what became of the pictures we made that day in the garden as the summer sun beat down. Renoir's painting, when completed, was purchased I believe by a woman named Marjorie, who later sold it directly or indirectly to the government of the United States, in order to raise money for some things she wanted to buy, evidently. Manet's painting, also, was bought and sold one or more times until it, too, ended up at a location overseas. And as for my painting—well, so moved was I by the events of that afternoon, I decided I must change my picture completely. I took the portrait I had been working on and glued additional canvas to it until it was twelve times as large, and stretched it on a new frame. I then included the struggle between the two painters, and a sequence-drawing of the holds they used, and an effect of the droplets of sweat flying in the air, and the terrified eyes of my family, and myself as participant and observer—all overhung by the dust of our exertions in shafts of late-afternoon light. When I had finished, I believed this was a work which would change forever the history of painting; but, unfortunately, it later became lost somewhere.

Blackout. Curtain.

—Ian Frazier

THE POINT

I HAD been lying awake after my nightmare, a nightmare in which Father and I bought helium balloons at a circus. I tied mine around my finger and Father tied his around a stringbean and lost it. After that, I lay in the dark, tossing and turning, sleepless from all the sand in my sheets and all the uproar out in the living room. Then the door opened, and for a moment the blade of bright light blinded me. The party was still going full blast, and now with the door ajar and my eyes adjusting I glimpsed the silver smoke swirling in the light and all the people suspended in it, hovering around as if they were angels in Heaven—some kind of Heaven where the host serves highballs and the men smoke cigars and the women all smell like rotting fruit. Everything was hysterical out there—the men laughing, the ice clinking, the women shrieking. A woman crossed over and sat on the edge of my bed, bending over me. It was Mother. She was backlit, a vague, looming silhouette, but I could smell lily of the valley and something else—lemon rind from the bitter twist she always chewed when she reached the watery bottom of her vodka-and-tonic. When Father was alive, she rarely drank, but after he shot himself you could say she really let herself go.

"Dearest?" she said.

"Hi, Mom," I said.

"Your old mother's bombed, dearest—flat-out bombed."

"That's O.K.," I said. She liked to confess these things to me, although it was always obvious how tanked she was, and I never cared. I considered myself a pro at this business. "It's a party," I said, casually. "Live it up."

"Oh, God," she laughed. "I don't know how I got this way."

"What do you want, Mom?"

"Yes, dear," she said. "There was something I wanted."

She looked out the window—at the sail-white moon beyond the black branches of the apple tree—and then she looked into my eyes. "What was it I wanted?" Her eyes were moist, and mapped with red veins. "I came here for a reason," she said, "but I've forgotten it now."

"Maybe if you go back you'll remember," I suggested.

Just then, Mrs. Gurney leaned through the doorway. "Well?" she said, slumping down on the floor. Mrs. Gurney had bright-silver hair and a dark tan—the sort of tan that women around here get when their marriages start busting up. I could see the gaudy gold chains looped around Mrs. Gurney's dark-brown neck winking in the half-light before they plunged from sight into the darker gulf between her breasts.

"That's it," Mother said. "Mrs. Gurney. She's worse off than me. She's really blitzo. Blotto? Blitzed?"

"Hand me my jams," I said.

I slipped my swim trunks on underneath the covers.

For years, I'd been escorting these old inebriates over the sandy playfield and along the winding boardwalks and up the salt-whitened steps of their homes, brewing coffee, fixing a little toast or heating leftovers, searching the medicine cabinets for aspirin and Vitamin B, setting a glass of water on the nightstand, or the coffee table if they'd collapsed on the couch—and even, once, tucking some old fart snugly into bed between purple silk sheets. I'd guide these drunks home and hear stories about the alma mater, Theta Xi, Boeing stock splits, Cadillacs, divorce, Nembutal, infidelity, and often the people I helped home gave me three or four bucks for listening to all their sad business. I suppose it was better than a paper route. Father, who'd been a medic in Vietnam, made it my job when I was ten, and at thirteen I considered myself a hard-core veteran, treating every trip like a mission.

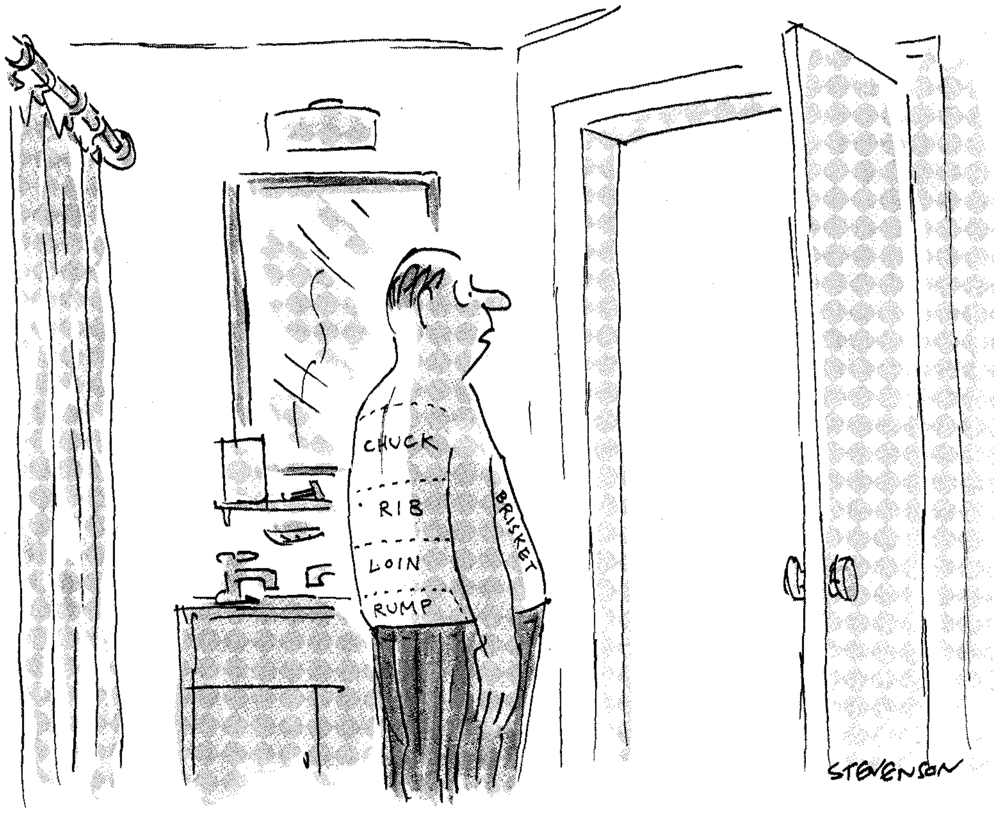
"O.K., Mrs. Gurney," I said. "Upsy-daisy."

She held her hand out, and I grabbed it, leaned back, and hoisted her to her feet. She stood there a minute, listing this way, that way, like a sailor who hadn't been to port in a while.

Mother kissed her wetly on the lips and then said to me, "Hurry home."

"I'm toasted," Mrs. Gurney explained. "Just toasted."

"Let's go out the back way," I said. It would only take longer if we had to navigate our way through the party, offering excuses and making those ridiculous promises adults always make



"Dorothy, could you come here a minute?"

to one another when the party's over. "Hey, we'll do it again," they assure each other, as if that needed to be said. And I'd noticed how, with the summer ending, and Labor Day approaching, all the adults would acquire a sort of desperate, clinging manner, as if this were all going to end forever, and the good times would never be seen again. Of course I now realize that the end was just an excuse to party like maniacs. The softball tournament, the salmon derby, the cocktails, the clambakes, the barbecues would all happen again. They always had and they always would.

Anyway, out the back door and down the steps.

Once, I'd made a big mistake with a retired account executive, a friend of Father's. Fred was already falling-down drunk, so it didn't help at all that he had two more drinks on the way out the door, apologizing for his condition, which no one noticed, and boisterously offering bad stock tips. I finally got Fred going and dragged him partway home in a wagon, dumping his fat ass in front of his house—close enough, I figured—wedged in against some driftwood so the tide wouldn't wash him out to sea. He didn't get taken out to sea, but the sea did come to him, as the tide rose, and when he woke he was lassoed in green kelp. Fortunately, he'd forgotten the whole thing—how he'd got where he was, where he'd been before that—but it scared me, that a more or less right-hearted attempt on my part might end in such an ugly mess.

By now, though, I'd worked this job so long I knew all the tricks.

THE moon was full and immaculately white in a blue-black sky. The wind funnelled down Saratoga Passage, blowing hard, blowing south, and Mrs. Gurney and I were struggling against it, tacking back and forth across the playfield. Mrs. Gurney strangled her arm around my neck and we wobbled along. Bits of sand shot in our eyes and blinded us.

"Keep your head down, Mrs. Gurney! I'll guide you!"

She plopped herself down in the sand, nesting there as if she were going to lay an egg. She unbuckled her sandals and tossed them behind her. I ran back and fetched them from the sand. Her skirt fluttered in the wind and flew up in her face. Her silver hair, which was usually shellacked with spray and coiffed to resemble a crash helmet, cracked and blew apart, splintering like a clutch of straw.

"Why'd I drink so damned much?" she screamed. "I'm toasted—really, Kurt, I'm totally toasted. I shouldn't have drunk so damn much."

"Well, you did, Mrs. Gurney," I said, bending toward her. "That's not the problem now. The problem now is how to get you home."

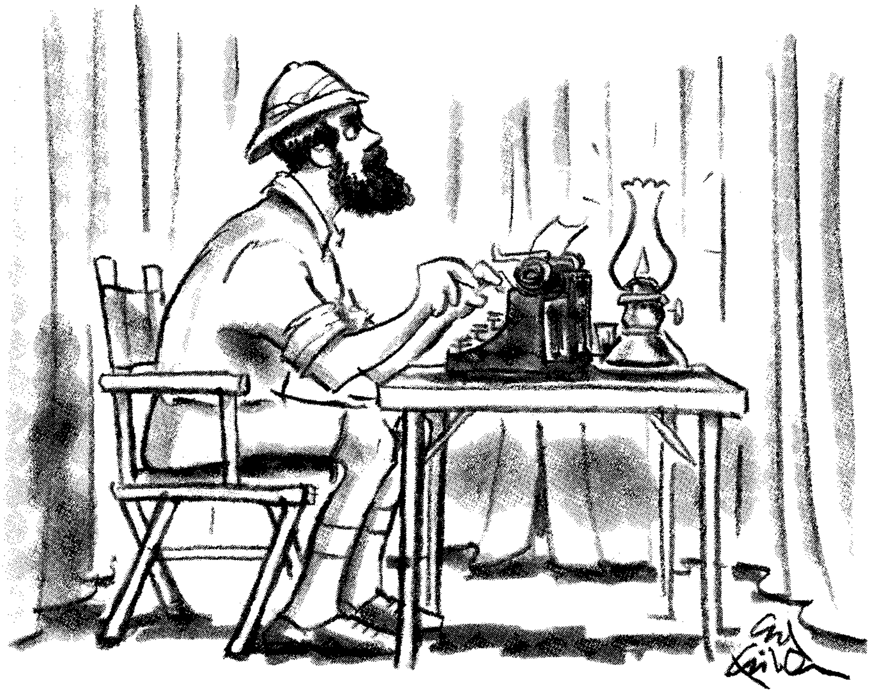
"Why, God damn it!"

"Trust me, Mrs. Gurney. Home is where you want to be."

One tip about these drunks: My opinion is that it pays in the long run to stick as close as possible to the task at hand. We're just going home, you assure them, and tomorrow it will all be different. I've found if you stray too far from the simple goal of getting home and going to sleep you let yourself in for a lot of unnecessary hell. You start hearing about their whole miserable existence, and suddenly it's the most important thing in the world to fix it all up, right then. Certain things in life can't be repaired, as in Father's situation, and that's always sad, but I believe there's nothing in life that can be remedied under the influence of half a dozen planter's punches.

Now, not everyone on the Point was a crazed rumhound, but the ones that weren't, the people who accurately assessed their capacities and balanced their intake accordingly, the people who never got lost, who never passed out in flower beds or, adrift in the maze of narrow boardwalks, gave up the search for home altogether and walked into any old house that was nearby—they, the people who never did these things and knew what they were about, never needed my help. They also weren't too friendly with my mother and didn't participate in her weekly bashes. The Point was kind of divided

HENRY M. STANLEY, HAVING SWITCHED EMPLOYERS IN MID-EXPEDITION, CONFORMS TO THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE BOOK.



"A reporter, entering Ujiji, approached the presumed Dr. Livingstone and ascertained that the man was indeed the long-sought physician. . . ."

• •

ELEGY

Light on the table so capable of leaving.
Jackal of noise drifting through these rooms, scent of heat.

Think of that day you took me to the eye doctor's,
His blurry office, the shining medical charts.

What did I see when he placed a picture of a fly before me?
I saw it fly, become what it claimed to be.

Tonight, unobserved, blackness lifts you out of your grave in Florida,
Atom by atom, and translates you back through its sieve.

But I still think of you lying in the ground in street clothes,
Flowers rocketing past you through the black horizon of soil

Until they burst into blooms in the outer space which was your life.
Close my well-repaired eyes, open my unrepaired heart,

And I can feel your fingers trembling under the earth
As you try to catch them. Think, instead, of that day.

We took the ferry home.
The bent wire of a seagull's leg stirred the silence

And then an unruly alphabet of birds clamored behind the boat,
Kite of speech mimicking the air.

Your expression said let the birds have their reasons,
Let their beautiful resemblances mean less than their lives.

—Vickie Karp

• •

that way—between the upright, seaworthy residents and the easily overturned friends of my mother's.

Mrs. Gurney lived about a half mile up the beach in a bungalow with a lot of Gothic additions. The scuttlebutt on Mrs. Gurney was that while she wasn't divorced, her husband didn't love her. This kind of knowledge was part of my job, something I didn't relish but accepted as an occupational hazard. I knew all the gossip, the rumors, the rising and falling fortunes of my mother's friends. After a summer, I'd have the dirt on everyone, whether I wanted it or not. But I had developed a priestly sense of my position, and whatever anyone told me in a plastered, blathering confessional fit was as safe and privileged as if it had been spoken in a private audience with the Pope. Still, I hoped Mrs. Gurney would stick to the immediate goal and not start talking about how sad and lonely she was, or how cruel her husband was, or what was going to become of us all, etc.

The wind rattled the swings back and forth, chains creaking, and whipped the ragged flag, which flew at half-mast. Earlier that summer, Mr. Crutchfield, the insurance lawyer, had fallen overboard and drowned while hauling in his crab trap. He always smeared his bait box with Mentholatum, which is illegal, and the crabs went crazy for it, and I imagined that in his greed, catching over the limit, he couldn't haul the trap up but wouldn't let go, either, and the weight pulled him into the sea, and he had a heart attack and drowned. The current floated him all the way to Everett before he was found, white and bloated as soggy bread.

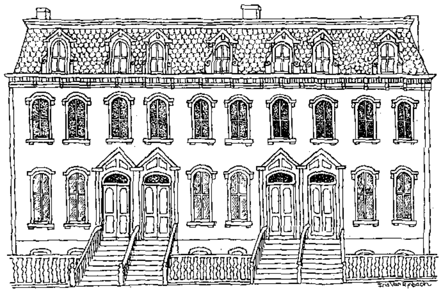
Mrs. Gurney was squatting on the ground, lifting fistfuls of sand and letting them course through her fingers, the grains falling away as through an hourglass.

"Mrs. Gurney? We're not making much progress."

She rose to her feet, gripping my pant leg, my shirt, my sleeve, then my neck. We started walking again. The sand was deep and loose, and with every step we sank down through the soft layers until a solid purchase was gained in the hard-packed sand below, and we could push off in baby steps. The night was sharp, and alive with shadows—everything, even the tiny tufted weeds that sprouted through the sand, had a shadow—and this deepened the world, made it seem thicker, with layers, and more layers, and then a darkness into which I couldn't see.

"You know," Mrs. Gurney said, "the thing about these parties is, the thing about drinking is—you know, getting so damnably blasted is . . ." She stopped, and tried to mash her wild hair back down into place, and, no longer holding on to anything other than her head, fell back on her ass into the sand.

I waited for her to finish her sentence, then gave up, knowing it was gone forever. Her lipstick, I noticed, was smeared clownishly around her mouth, fixing her lips into a frown, or maybe a smirk. She smelled different from my mother—like pepper, I thought, and bananas. She was taller than me, and a little plump, with a nose shaped exactly like her head, like a miniature replica of it right in the middle of her face.



We finally got off the playfield and onto the boardwalk that fronted the seawall. A wooden wagon leaned over in the sand. I tipped it upright.

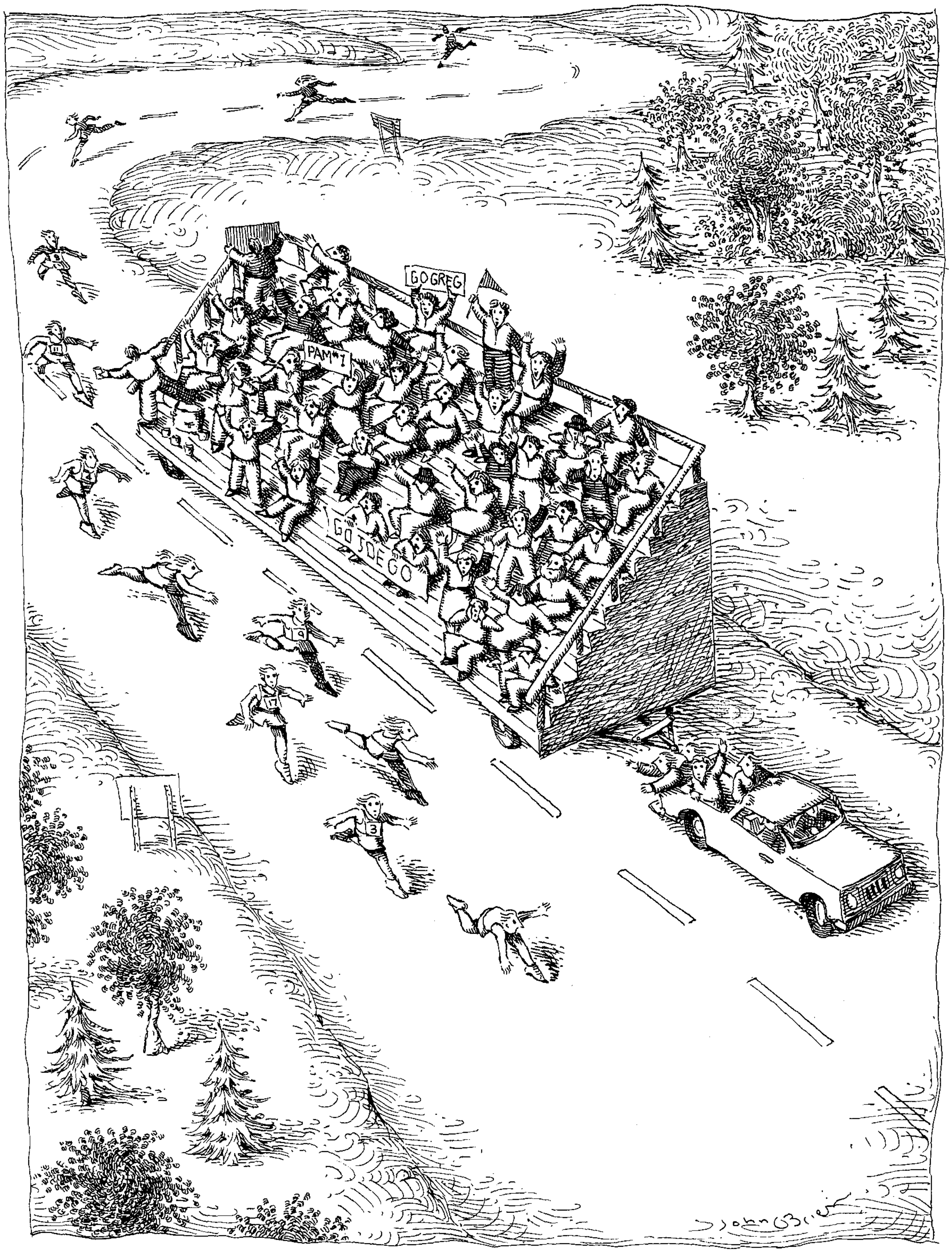
"Here you go, Mrs. Gurney," I said, pointing to the wagon. "Hop aboard."

"I'm O.K.," she protested. "I'm fine. Fine and dandy."

"You're not fine, Mrs. Gurney."

The caretaker built these wagons out of old hatches from P.T. boats. They were heavy, monstrous, and made to last. Once you got them rolling, they cruised.

Mrs. Gurney got in, not without a good deal of operatics, and when I finally got her to shut up and sit down I started pulling. I'd never taken her



home before, but on a scale of one to ten, ten being the most obstreperous, I was rating her about a six at this point.

She stretched out like Cleopatra floating down the Nile in her barge. "Stop the world," she sang, "I want to get off."

I vaguely recalled that as a song from my parents' generation. It reminded me of my father, who shot himself in the head one morning—did I already say this? He was sitting in the grass parking lot above the Point. Officially, his death was ruled an accident, a "death by misadventure," and everyone believed that he had in fact been cleaning his gun, but Mother told me otherwise, one night. Mother had a batch of lame excuses she tried on me, but it only made me sad to see her groping for an answer and falling way short. I wished she'd come up with something, just for herself. Father used to say that everyone up here was *dinky dow*, which is Vietnamese patois for "crazy." At times, after Father died, I thought Mother was going a little *dinky dow* herself.

I leaned forward, my head bent against the wind. Off to starboard, the sea was black, with a line of moonlit white waves continually crashing on the shore. Far off, I could see the dark headlands of Hat Island, the island itself rising from the water like a breaching whale, and then, beyond, the soft, blue, irresolute lights of Everett, on the distant mainland.

I stopped for a breather, and Mrs. Gurney was gone. She was sitting on the boardwalk, a few houses back.

"Look at all these houses," Mrs. Gurney said, swinging her arms around.

"Let's go, Mrs. Gurney."

"Another fucking great summer at the Point."

The wind seemed to be refreshing Mrs. Gurney, but that was a hard one to call. Often, drunks seemed on the verge of sobering up, and then, just as soon as they got themselves nicely balanced, they plunged off the other side, into depression.

"Poor Crutchfield," Mrs. Gurney said. We stood in front of Mr. Crutchfield's house. An upstairs light

—in the bedroom, I knew—was on, although the lower stories were dark and empty. "And Lucy—God, such grief. They loved each other, Kurt." Mrs. Gurney frowned. "They loved each other. And now?"

Actually, the Crutchfields hadn't loved each other—information I alone was privy to. Lucy's grief, I was sure, had to do with the fact that her husband died in a state of absolute misery, and now she would never be able to change things. In Lucy's mind, he would be forever screwing around, and she would be forever waiting for him to cut it out and come home. After he died, she spread the myth of their reconciliation, and everyone believed it, but I knew it to be a lie. Mr. Crutchfield's sense of failure over the marriage was enormous. He blamed himself, as perhaps he should have. But I remember, one night earlier in the summer, telling him it was O.K., that if he was unhappy with Lucy, it was fine to fuck around. He said, You think so? I said, Sure, go for it.

Of course, you might ask, what did I know? At thirteen, I'd never even smooched with a girl, but I had nothing to lose by encouraging him. He was drunk, he was miserable, and I had a job, and that job was to get him home and try to prevent him from dwelling too much on himself.

It was that night, the night I took Mr. Crutchfield home, as I walked back to our house, that I developed the theory of the black hole, and it helped me immeasurably in conducting this business of steering drunks around the Point. The idea was this—that at a certain age, a black hole emerged in the middle of your life, and everything got sucked into it, and you knew, forever afterward, that it was there, this dense negative space, and yet you went on, you struggled, you made your money, you had some babies, you got wasted, and you pretended it wasn't there and never looked directly at it, if you could manage the trick. I imagined that this black hole existed somewhere just behind you and also somewhere just in front of you, so that you were always leaving it behind and entering it at the same time. I hadn't worked out the spatial thing too carefully, but that's what I imagined. Sometimes the hole was only a pinprick in the mind, often it was vast, frequently it fluctuated, beating like a heart, but it was always there, and when you got drunk, thinking to escape, you only noticed it more. Anyway, when I discovered this, much like an astronomer gazing out at the universe, I thought I had the key—and it became a policy with me never to let one of my drunks think too much and fall backward or forward into the black hole. We're going home, I would say to them—we're just going home.

I wondered how old Mrs. Gurney was, and guessed thirty-seven. I imagined her black hole was about the size of a sewer cap.

MRS. GURNEY sat down on the hull of an overturned life raft. She reached up under her skirt and pulled her nylons off, rolling them down her legs, tossing the little black doughnuts into the wind. I fetched them, too, and stuffed them into the straps of her sandals.

"Much better," she said.

"We're not far now, Mrs. Gurney. We'll have you home in no time."

She managed to stand up on her own. She floated past me, heading toward the sea. A tangle of ghostly gray driftwood—old tree stumps, logs loosed from booms, planks—barred the way, being too treacherous for her to climb in such a drunken state, I thought, but Mrs. Gurney just kept going, her hair exploding in the wind, her skirt billowing like a sail, her arms wavering like a trapeze artist's high up on the wire.

"Mrs. Gurney?" I called.

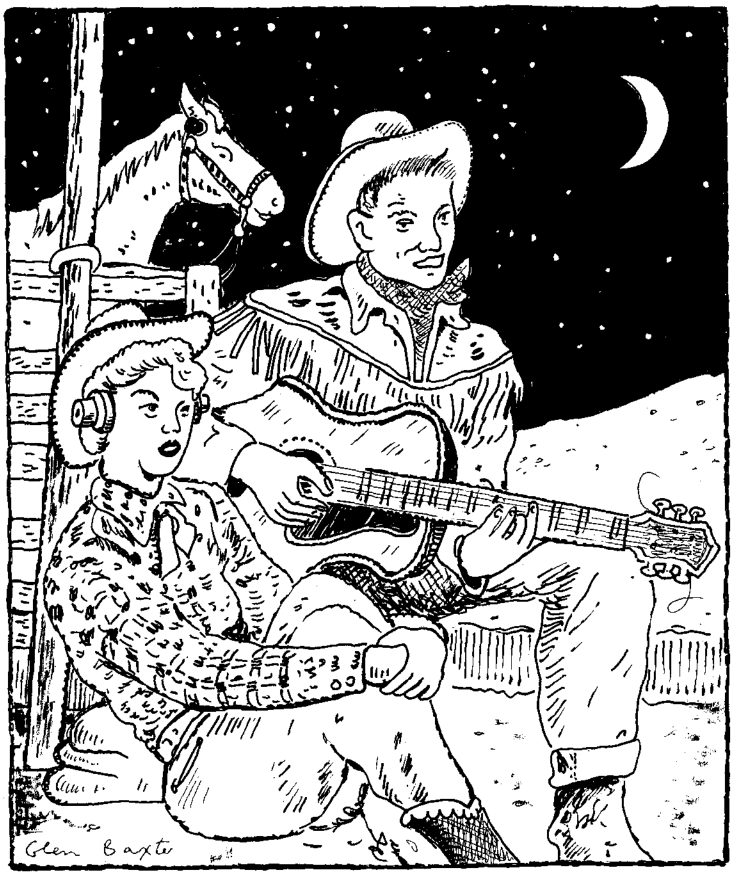
"I want—" she started, but the wind tore her words away. Then she sat down on a log, and when I got there, she was holding her head in her hands and vomiting between her legs. Vomit, and the spectacle of adults vomiting, was one of the unpleasant aspects of this job. I hated to see these people in such an abject position. Still, after three years, I knew in which closets the mops and sponges and cleansers were kept in quite a few houses on the Point.

I patted Mrs. Gurney's shoulder, and said, "That's O.K., that's O.K., just go right ahead. You'll feel much better when it's all out."

She choked and spat, and a trail of silver hung from her lip down to the sand. "Oh, damn it all, Kurt. Just damn it all to hell." She raised her head. "Look at me, just look at me, will you?"

She looked a little wretched, but all right. I'd seen worse.

"Have a cigarette, Mrs.



LUCKILY, THE INDUSTRIAL-STRENGTH EARPLUGS I HAD PURCHASED IN TUCSON WERE HOLDING UP WELL AGAINST THE ONSLAUGHT.

Gurney," I said. "Calm down."

I didn't smoke, myself—thinking it was a disgusting habit—but I'd observed from past experience that a cigarette must taste good to a person who has just thrown up. A cigarette or two seemed to calm people right down, giving them something simple to concentrate on.

Mrs. Gurney handed me her cigarettes. I shook one from the pack and stuck it in my mouth. I struck half a dozen matches before I got one going, cupping the flame against the wind in the style of old war movies. I puffed the smoke. I passed Mrs. Gurney the cigarette, and she dragged on it, abstracted, gazing off. I waited, and let her smoke in peace.

"I feel god-awful," Mrs. Gurney groaned.

"It'll go away, Mrs. Gurney. You're drunk. We just have to get you home."

"Look at my skirt," she said.

True, she'd messed it up a little, barfing on herself, but it was nothing a little soap and water couldn't fix. I told her that.

"How old am I, Kurt?" she retorted.

I pretended to think it over, then aimed low.

"Twenty-nine? Good God!" Mrs. Gurney stared out across the water, at the deep, black shadow of Hat Island, and I looked, too, and it was remarkable, the way that darkness carved itself out of the darkness all around. But I could marvel over this when I was off duty.

"I'm thirty-eight, Kurt," she screamed. "Thirty-eight, thirty-eight, thirty-eight!"

I was losing her. She was heading for ten on a scale of ten.

"On a dark night, bumping around," she said, "you can't tell the difference between thirty-eight and forty. Fifty! Sixty!" She pitched her cigarette in a high, looping arc that exploded against a log in a spray of gold sparks. "Where am I going, God damn it?"

"You're going home, Mrs. Gurney. Hang tough."

"I want to die."

A few boats rocked in the wind, and a seal moaned out on the diving raft, the cries carrying away from us, south, downwind. A red warning beacon flashed out on the sandbar. Mrs. Gurney clambered over the driftwood and weaved across the wet sand toward the sea. She stood by the shoreline, and for a moment I thought she might hurl herself into the breach, but she didn't. She stood on the shore's edge, the white waves swirling at her feet, and dropped her skirt around her ankles. She was wearing a silky white slip underneath, the sheen like a bike reflector in the moonlight. She waded out into the water and squatted down, scrubbing her skirt. Then she walked out of the water and stretched herself on the sand.

"Mrs. Gurney?"

"I've got the fucking spins."

Her eyes were closed. I suggested that she open them. "It makes a difference," I said. "And sit up, Mrs. Gurney. That makes a difference, too."

"You've had the spins?" Mrs. Gurney asked. "Don't tell me you sneak into your mother's liquor cabinet, Kurt Pittman. Don't tell me that. Please, just please spare me that. Jesus Christ, I couldn't take it. Really, I couldn't take it, Kurt. Just shut the fuck up about that, all right?"

I'd never taken a drink in my life. "I don't drink, Mrs. Gurney."

"I don't drink, Mrs. Gurney," she repeated. "You prig."

I wondered what time it was, and how long we'd been gone.

"Do you know how suddenly life can turn?" Mrs. Gurney asked. "How bad it can get?"

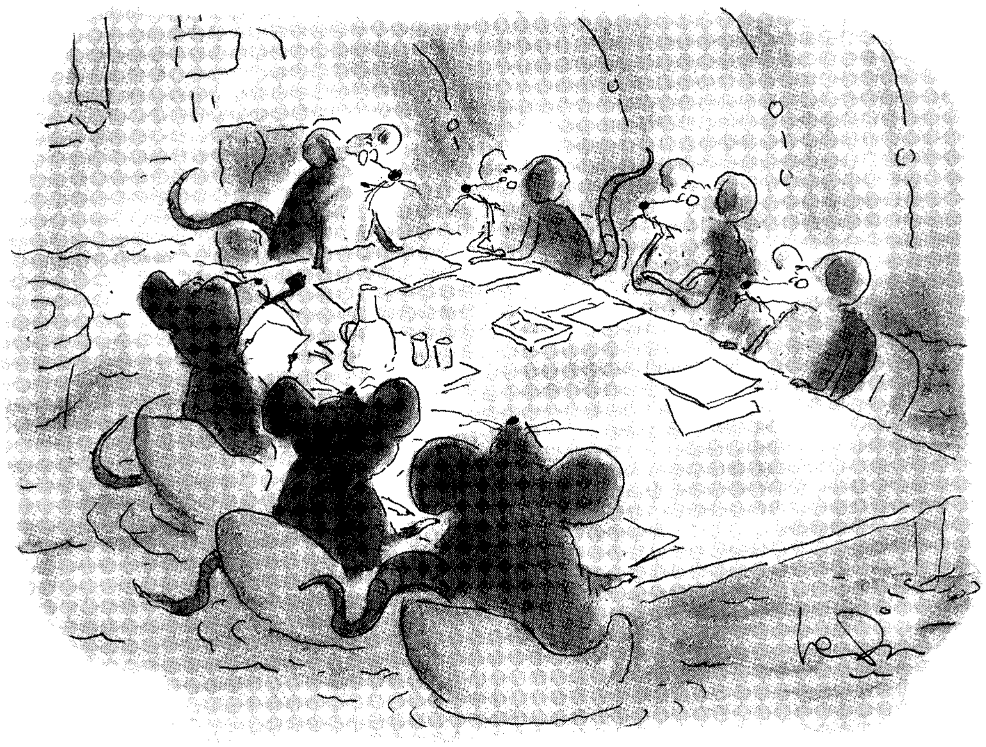
At first I didn't say anything. This kind of conversation didn't lead anywhere. Mrs. Gurney was drunk and belligerent. She was looking for an enemy. "We need to get you home, Mrs. Gurney," I said. "That's my only concern."

"Your only concern," Mrs. Gurney said, imitating me again. "Lucky you."

I stood there, slightly behind Mrs. Gurney. I was getting tired, but sitting down in the sand might indicate to her that where we were was O.K., and it wasn't. We needed to get beyond this stage, this tricky stage of grovelling in the sand and feeling depressed, and go to sleep.

"We're not getting anywhere like this," I said.

"I've got cottonmouth," Mrs. Gurney said. She made fish movements with her mouth. She was shivering, too. She clasped her knees and tucked her head between her legs, try-



"According to the most recent report, we have no recourse but to abandon ship."

• •

ing to ball herself up like a potato bug.

"Kurt," Mrs. Gurney said, looking up at me, "do you think I'm beautiful?"

I switched the sandals I was holding to the other hand. First I'll tell you what I said, and then I'll tell you what I was thinking. I said yes, and I said it immediately. And why? Because I sensed that questions that didn't receive an immediate response fell away into silence and were never answered. They got sucked into the black hole. I'd observed this, and I knew the trick was to close the gap in Mrs. Gurney's mind, to bridge that spooky silence between the question and the answer. There she was, drunk, sick, shivering, loveless, sitting in the sand and asking me, a mere boy, if I thought she was beautiful. I said yes, because I knew it wouldn't hurt, or cost me anything but one measly breath, though that wasn't really my answer. The answer was in the immediacy, the swiftness of my response, stripped of all uncertainty and hesitation.

"Yes," I said.

MRS. GURNEY lay down again in the sand. She unbuttoned her blouse and unfastened her brassiere.

I scanned the dark, and fixed my eyes on a tug hauling a barge north through the Passage, up to the San Juans.

Mrs. Gurney sat up. She shrugged out of her blouse and slipped her bra off and threw them into the wind. Again, I fetched her things from where they fell, and held the bundle at my side, waiting.

"That's better," Mrs. Gurney said, arching her back and stretching her hands in the air, waggling them as if she were some kind of dignitary in a parade. "The wind blowing, it's like a spirit washing over you."

"We should go, Mrs. Gurney."

"Sit, Kurt, sit," she said, patting the wet sand. The imprint of her hand remained there a few seconds, then flattened and vanished. The tide was coming in fast, and it would be high tonight, with the moon full.

I crouched down, a few feet away.

"So you think I'm beautiful?" Mrs. Gurney said. She stared ahead, not looking at me, letting the words drift in the wind.

"This really isn't a question of beauty or not beauty, Mrs. Gurney."

"No?"

"No," I said. "I know your husband doesn't love you, Mrs. Gurney. That's the problem here."

"Beauty," she sang.

"No. Like they say, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. You don't have a beholder anymore, Mrs. Gurney."

"The moon and the stars," she said, "the wind and the sea."

Wind, sea, stars, moon: we were in uncharted territory, and it was my fault. I'd let us stray from the goal, and now it was nowhere in sight. I had to steer this thing back on course, or we'd end up talking about God.

"Get dressed, Mrs. Gurney; it's cold. This isn't good. We're going home."

She clasped her knees, and rocked back and forth. She moaned, "It's so far."

"It's not far," I said. "We can see it from here."

"Someday I'm leaving all this to you," Mrs. Gurney said, waving her hands around in circles, pointing at just about everything in the world. "When I get it from my husband, after the divorce, I'm leaving it to you. That's a promise, Kurt. I mean that. It'll be in my will. You'll get a call. You'll get a call and you'll know I'm dead. But you'll be happy, you'll be very happy, because all of this will belong to you."

Her house was only a hundred yards away. A wind sock, full of the air that passed through it, whipped back and forth on a tall white pole. Her two kids had been staying in town most of that summer. I wasn't sure if they were up this weekend. She'd left the porch light on for herself.

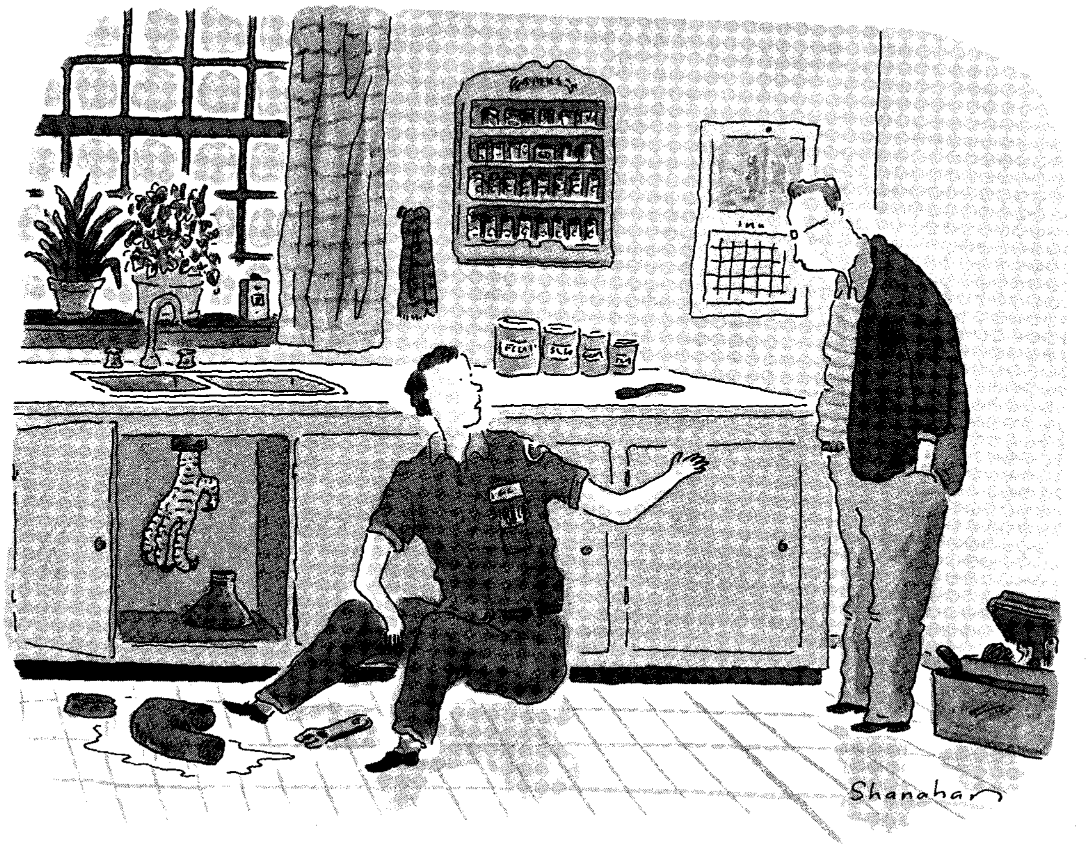
"You'd like all this, right?" Mrs. Gurney asked.

"Now is not the time to discuss it," I said.

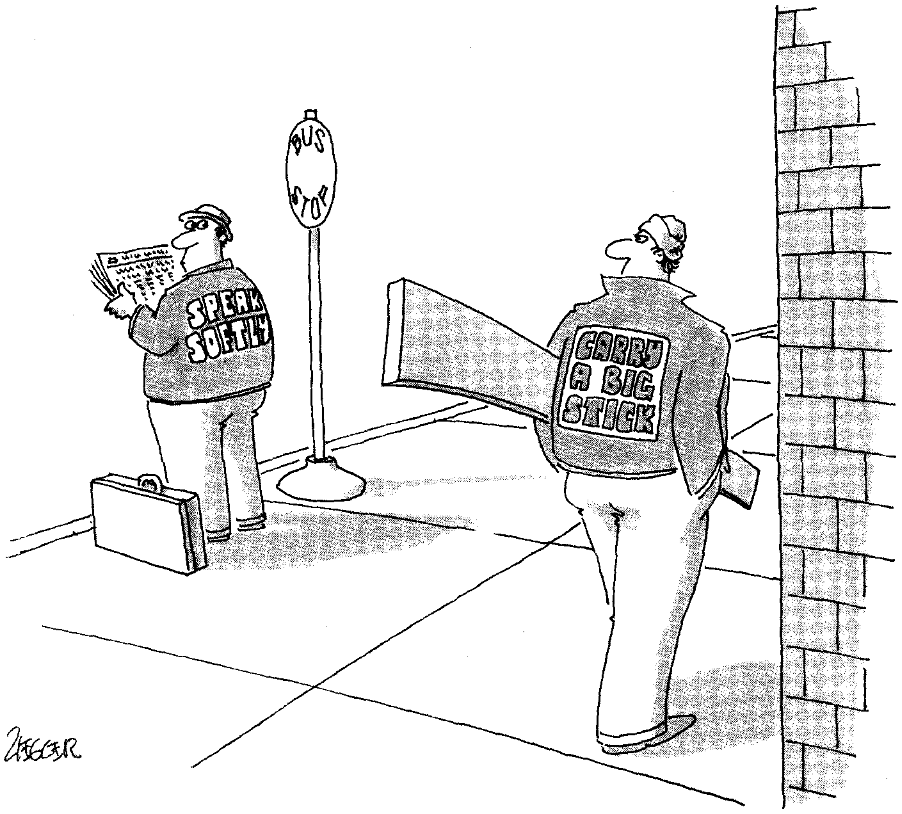
Mrs. Gurney lay back down in the sand. "The stars have tails," she said. "When they spin."

I looked up; they seemed fixed in place to me.

"The first time I fell in love I was fourteen. I fell in love when I was fifteen, I fell in love when I was sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. I just kept falling, over and over," Mrs. Gurney said. "This eventually led to marriage." She packed a lump of wet sand on her chest. "It's so stupid—you know where I met him?"



"Hand me my claw hammer."



I assumed she was referring to Jack, to Mr. Gurney. "No," I said.

"On a golf course, can you believe it?"

"Do you golf, Mrs. Gurney?"

"No! Hell no."

"Does Jack?"

"No."

I couldn't help her—it's the stories that don't make sense that drunks like to repeat. From some people, I'd been hearing the same stories every summer for the last three years—the kind everyone thinks is special, never realizing how everyone tells pretty much the same one, never realizing how all those stories blend, one to the next, and bleed into each other.

"I'm thirsty," Mrs. Gurney said. "I'm so homesick."

"We're close now," I said.

"That's not what I mean," she said. "You don't know what I mean."

"Maybe not," I said. "Please put your shirt on, Mrs. Gurney."

"I'll kill myself," Mrs. Gurney said. "I'll go home and I'll kill myself."

"That won't get you anywhere."

"It'll show them."

"You'd just be dead, Mrs. Gurney. Then you'd be forgotten."

"Crutchfield isn't forgotten. Poor Crutchfield. The flag's at half-mast."

"This year," I said. "Next year it'll be back where it always is."

"My boys wouldn't forget."

That was certainly true, I thought, but I didn't want to get into it.

Mrs. Gurney sat up. She shook her head back and forth, wildly, and sand flew from it. Then she stood, wobbling. I held the shirt out to her, looking down. She wiggled her toes, burrowing them into the sand.

"Look at me," Mrs. Gurney said.

"I'd rather not, Mrs. Gurney," I said. "Tomorrow you'll be glad I didn't."

For a moment we didn't speak, and into that empty space rushed the wind, the waves, the moaning seal out on the diving raft. I looked up, into Mrs. Gurney's eyes, which were dark green, and floating in tears. She stared back, but kind of vaguely, and I wondered what she saw.

I had the feeling that the first to flinch would lose.

She took the shirt from my hand.

I looked.

In this, I had no experience, but I knew what I saw was not young flesh. Her breasts sagged away like sacks of wet sand, slumping off to either side. They were quite enormous, I thought, although I had nothing to compare them with. There were long whitish scars on them, as if a wild man or a bear had clawed her. The nipples were purple in the moonlight, and they puckered in the cold wind. The gold, squiggling loops of chain shone against the dark of her neck, and the V of her tan line made everything else seem astonishingly white. The tan skin of her chest looked like parchment, like the yellowed, crinkled page of some ancient text, maybe the Bible, or the Constitution, the original copy, or even the rough draft.

Mrs. Gurney slipped the shirt over her shoulders and let it flap there in the wind. It blew off and tumbled down the beach. She sighed. Then she stepped closer and leaned toward me. I could smell her—the pepper, the bananas.

"Mrs. Gurney," I said, "let's go home now." The tide was high enough for us to feel the first foamy white reaches of the waves wash around our feet. The receding waves dragged her shirt into the sea, and then the incoming waves flung it back. It hung there in the margin, agitated. We were looking into each other's eyes. Up so close, there was nothing familiar in hers; they were just glassy and dark and expressionless.

It was then, I was sure, that her hand brushed the front of my trunks. I don't remember too much of what I was thinking, if I was, and this, this not thinking too clearly, might have been my downfall. What is it out there that indicates the right way? I might have gone down all the way. I might have sunk right there. I knew all the words for it, and they were all short and brutal. Fuck, poke, screw. A voice told me I could get away with it. Who will know the difference, the voice asked. It said, Go for it. And I knew the voice, knew it was the same voice that told Mr. Crutchfield to go ahead, fuck around. We were alone—nothing out there but the moon and the sea. I looked at Mrs. Gurney, looked into her eyes, and saw two black lines pouring out of them and running in crazy patterns down her cheeks.

I felt I should be gallant, or tender, and kiss Mrs. Gurney. I felt I should say something, then I felt I should be quiet. It seemed as if the moment were poised, as if everything were fragile, and held together with silence.

We moved up the beach, away from the shore and the incoming tide, and the sand beneath the surface still held some of the day's warmth.

I took off my T-shirt. "Put this on," I said.

She tugged it on, inside out, and I gathered up her sandals and stockings and her bra. We kept silent. We worked our way over the sand, over the tangle of driftwood, the wind heaving at us from the north.

We crossed the boardwalk, and I held Mrs. Gurney's elbow as we went up the steps of her house. Inside, I found the aspirin and poured a glass of apple cider, and brought these to her in bed, where she'd already curled up beneath a heavy Mexican blanket. She looked like she was sleeping underneath a rug. "I'm thirsty," she said, and drank down the aspirin with the juice. A lamp was on. Mrs. Gurney's silver hair splayed out against the pillow, poking like bike spokes, every which way. I knelt beside the bed, and she touched my hand and parted her lips to speak, but I squeezed her hand and her eyes closed. Soon she was asleep.

As I was going downstairs, her two boys, Mark and Timmy, came out of their bedroom, and stared at me from the landing.

"Mommy home?" asked Timmy, who was three.

"Yeah," I said. "She's in bed, she's sleeping."

They stood there on the lighted landing, blinking and rubbing knuckles in their eyes, and I stood below them on the steps in the dark.

"Where's the sitter?" I asked.

"She fell asleep," Timmy said.

"You guys should be asleep, too."

"I can't sleep," Timmy said. "Tell a bedtime story."

"I don't know any bedtime stories," I said.

BACK home, inside our house, the bright light and smoke stung my eyes. The living room was crowded, but I knew everybody—the Potters, the Shanks, the Capstands, etc. It was noisy and shrill, and someone had cranked up the Victrola, and one of my grandfather's old records was sending a sea of hissing static through the room. I could see on the mantel, through the curling smoke, the shrine Mother had made for Father: his Silver Star and Purple Heart, which he got in Lao Bao, up near Khe Sanh, near the DMZ when he was a medic. His diploma from medical school angled cockeyed off a cut nail. A foul ball he'd caught at a baseball game, his reading glasses, a pocketknife, a stethoscope, a framed Hippocratic oath with snakes wreathed around what looked like a barber pole. I saw Mother flit through the kitchen with a silver cocktail shaker, jerking it like a percussion instrument. She just kept pacing like a caged animal, rattling cracked ice in the shaker. I couldn't hear any distinct voices above the party noise. I stood there awhile. No one seemed to notice me until Fred, three sheets to the wind, as they say, hoisted his empty glass in the air, and said, "Hey, Captain!"

I went into the kitchen. Mother set down the shaker and looked at me. I gave her a hug. "I'm back," I said.

Then I crossed into my room and stripped the sheets from my bed. I hung them out the window and shook the

---

HOTEL LAUTRÉAMONT

I

Research has shown that ballads were produced by all of society
working as a team. They didn't just happen. There was no guesswork.
The people, then, knew what they wanted and how to get it.
We see the results in works as diverse as "Windsor Forest" and "The Wife of Usher's Well."

Working as a team, they didn't just happen. There was no guesswork.
The horns of elfland swing past, and in a few seconds
we see the results in works as diverse as "Windsor Forest" and "The Wife of Usher's Well,"
or, on a more modern note, in the finale of the Sibelius violin concerto.

The horns of elfland swing past, and in a few seconds
the world, as we know it, sinks into dementia, proving narrative passé
or on a more modern note, in the finale of the Sibelius violin concerto.
Not to worry, many hands are making work light again.

The world as we know it sinks into dementia, proving narrative passé.
In any case the ruling was long overdue.
Not to worry, many hands are making work light again,
so we stay indoors. The quest was only another adventure.

II

In any case, the ruling was long overdue.
The people are beside themselves with rapture
so we stay indoors. The quest was only another adventure
and the solution problematic, at any rate far off in the future.

The people are beside themselves with rapture,
yet no one thinks to question the source of so much collective euphoria,
and the solution: problematic, at any rate far off in the future.
The saxophone wails, the Martini glass is drained.

Yet no one thinks to question the source of so much collective euphoria.
In troubled times one looked to the shaman or priest for comfort and counsel.
The saxophone wails, the Martini glass is drained,
and night like black swansdown settles on the city.

In troubled times one looked to the shaman or priest for comfort and counsel.

• •

Now, only the willing are fated to receive death as a reward,
and night like black swansdown settles on the city.
If we tried to leave, would being naked help us?

III

Now, only the willing are fated to receive death as a reward.
Children twist hula hoops, imagining a door to the outside.
If we tried to leave, would being naked help us?
And what of older, lighter concerns? What of the river?

Children twist hula hoops, imagining a door to the outside,
when all we think of is how much we can carry with us.
And what of older, lighter concerns? What of the river?
All the behemoths have filed through the maze of time.

When all we think of is how much we can carry with us,
small wonder that those at home sit nervous by the unlit grate.
All the behemoths have filed through the maze of time.
It remains for us to come to terms with *our* commonalty.

Small wonder that those at home sit nervous by the unlit grate.
It was their choice, after all, that spurred us to feats of the
imagination.
It remains for us to come to terms with our commonalty
and in so doing deprive time of further hostages.

IV

It was their choice, after all, that spurred us to feats of the
imagination.
Now silently as one mounts a stair, we emerge into the open
and in so doing deprive time of further hostages,
to end the standoff that history long ago began.

Now silently as one mounts a stair, we emerge into the open
but it is shrouded, veiled: we must have made some ghastly error.
To end the standoff that history long ago began
must we thrust ever onward, into perversity?

But it is shrouded, veiled; we must have made some ghastly error.
You mop your forehead with a rose, recommending its thorns.
Must we thrust ever onward, into perversity?
Only night knows for sure; the secret is safe with her.

You mop your forehead with a rose, recommending its thorns.
Research has shown that ballads were produced by all of society;
only night can say for sure. The secret is safe with her:
the people, then, knew what they wanted and how to get it.

—JOHN ASHBERY

• •

sand away. I tossed the sheets back on the bed and stretched out, but I couldn't get to sleep. I got up and pulled one of Father's old letters out from under my mattress. I went out the back door. It was one of those nights on the Point when the blowing wind, the waves breaking in crushed white lines against the shore, the grinding sand, the moon-washed silhouettes of the huddled houses, the slapping of buoys offshore—when all of this seems to have been going on for a long, long time, and you feel eternity looking down on you. I sat on the swing. The letter was torn at the creases, and I opened it carefully, tilting it into the moonlight. It was dated 1966, and written to Mother. The print was smudged and hard to see.

First, the old news: thank you for the necktie. I'm not sure when I'll get a chance to wear it, but thanks. Now for my news. I've been wounded, but don't worry. I'm O.K.

For several days a company had been deployed on the perimeter of this village—the rumor was that somehow the fields had been planted with VC mines. The men work with tanks—picture tanks moving back and forth over a field like huge lawnmowers. They clear the way by exploding the mines. Generally VC mines are antipersonnel, and the idea is that the tanks are supposed to set off the mines and absorb the explosions. Tanks can easily sustain the blows, and the men inside are safe. A textbook operation. Simple. Yesterday they set off twelve mines. Who knows how they got there?

Clearing the perimeter took several days. Last night they thought they were done. But as the men were jumping off the tanks, one of them landed right on a mine. I was the first medic to reach him. His feet and legs were blown off, blown away up to his groin. I've never seen anything so terrible, but here's what I remember most clearly: a piece of shrapnel had penetrated his can of shaving cream, and it was shooting a stream of white foam about five feet in the air. Blood spilling everywhere, and then this fountain of white arcing out of his back. The pressure inside the can kept hissing. The kid was maybe nineteen. "Doc, I'm a mess," he said. I called in a medevac. I started packing dressings, then saw his eyes lock up, and tried to revive him with heart massage. The kid died before the shaving cream was done spraying.

Everything became weirdly quiet, considering the havoc, and then suddenly the LZ got hot and we took fire—fifteen minutes of artillery and incoming mortar fire, then quiet again. Nothing, absolutely nothing. I took a piece of shrapnel in my back, but don't worry. I'm all right, though I won't have occasion to wear that tie soon. I didn't even know I was wounded until I felt the blood, and even then I thought it was someone else's.

Strange, during that fifteen minutes of action I felt no fear. But there's usually not much contact with the enemy. Often you don't see a single VC the whole time. Days pass without any contact. They're out there, you know, yet you never see them. Just mines, booby traps. I'm only a medic, and my contact with the enemy is rarely direct—what I see are the wounded men and the dead, the bodies. I see the destruction, and I have begun to both fear and hate the Vietnamese—even here in South Vietnam, I can't tell whose side they're on. Every day I visit a nearby village and help a local doctor vaccinate children. The morning after the attack I felt the people in the village were laughing at me because they knew an American had died. Yesterday I returned to the same village. Everything quiet, business as usual, but I stood there, surrounded by hooches, thinking of that dead kid, and for a moment I felt the urge to even the score somehow.

What am I saying, sweetie? I'm a medic, trained to save lives. Every day I'm closer to death than most people ever get, except in their final second on earth. It's a world of hurt—that's the phrase we use—and things happen over here, things you just can't keep to yourself. I've seen what happens to men who try. They're consumed by what they've seen and done, they grow obsessive, and slowly they lose sight of the job they're supposed to be doing. I have no

"Now a hand for our next guests—a famous author and his big best-seller!"

• •

hard proof of this, but I think in this condition men open themselves up to attack. You've got to talk things out, get *everything very clear in your mind.* Lucky for me I've got a buddy over here who's been under fire too, and can understand what I'm feeling. That helps.

I'm sorry to write like this, but in your letter you said you wanted to know everything. It's not in my power to say what this war means to you or anyone back home, but I can describe what happens, and if you want, I'll continue doing that. For me, at least, it's a comfort to know someone's out there, far away, who can't really understand, and I hope is never able to. I'll write again soon.

All love,
HENRY

I'd snagged this letter from a box Mother kept in her room, under the bed. There were other kinds of letters in the box, letters about love and family and work, but I didn't think Mother would miss this one, which was just about war. Father never talked much about his tours in Vietnam, but he would if I asked. Out of respect, I learned not to ask too much, but I knew about Zippo raids, trip flares, bouncing bettys, hand frags, satchel charges, and such, and when he was angry, or sad, Father often peppered his speech with slang he'd picked up, like *titi,* which means "little," and *didi mow,* which means "go quickly," and *xin loi,* meaning "sorry about that."

I tucked the letter away. I got the swing going real good, and I rose up, then fell, rose and fell, seeing, then not seeing. When the swing was going high enough I let go, and sailed through the open air, landing in an explosion of soft sand. I wiped the grains out of my eyes. My eyes watered, and everything was unclear. Things toppled and blew in the wind. A striped beach umbrella rolled across the playfield, twirling like a pinwheel. A sheet from someone's clothesline flapped loose and sailed away. I thought of my nightmare, of Father's balloon tied to a stringbean. I looked up at the sky, and it was black, with some light. There were stars, millions of them like tiny holes in something, and the moon, like a bigger hole in the same thing. White holes. I thought of Mrs. Gurney and her blank eyes and the black pouring out of them. Was it the wind, a sudden gust kicking up and brushing my trunks? It happened so quickly. Had she tried to touch me? Had she? I stretched out in the sand. The wind gave me goose bumps. Shivering, I listened. From inside the house, I heard the men laughing, the ice clinking, the women shrieking. Everything in there was still hysterical. I'd never get to sleep. I decided to stay awake. They would all be going home, but until then I'd wait outside.

I lay there, very quietly. I brushed some sand off me. I waited.

It was me who found Father, that morning. I'd gone up to get some creosote out of the trunk of his car. It was a cold, gray, misty morning, the usual kind we have, and in the grass field above the parking lot there was a family of deer, chewing away, looking around, all innocent. And there he was, sitting in the car. I opened the passenger door. At first my eyes kind of separated from my brain, and I saw everything, real slow, like you might see a movie, or something far away that wasn't happening to you. Some of his face was gone. One of his eyes was staring out. He was still breathing, but his lungs worked like he'd swallowed a yard of chunk gravel or sand. He was twitching. I touched his hand and the fingers curled around mine, gripping, but it was just nerves, an old reaction or something, because he was brain-dead already. My imagination jumped right out of its box when he grabbed me. I knew right away I was being grabbed by a dead man. I got away. I ran away. In our house I tried to speak, but there were no words. I started pounding the walls and kicking over the furniture and breaking stuff. I couldn't see, I heard falling. I ran around the house holding and ripping at my head. Eventually Mother caught me. I just pointed up to the car. You understand, I miss Father, miss having him around to tell me what's right and what's wrong, or to talk about *boom-boom,* which is sex, or just to go salmon fishing out by Hat Island, and not worry about things, either way, but I also have to say, never again do I want to see anything like what I saw that morning. I never, as long as I live, want to find another dead person. He wasn't even a person then, just a blown-up thing, just crushed-up garbage. Part of his head was blasted away, and there was blood and hair and bone splattered on the windshield. It looked like he'd just driven the car through something awful, like he needed to use the windshield wipers, needed to switch the blades on high and clear the way, except that the wipers wouldn't do him any good, because the mess was all on the inside.

—CHARLES D'AMBROSIO, JR.

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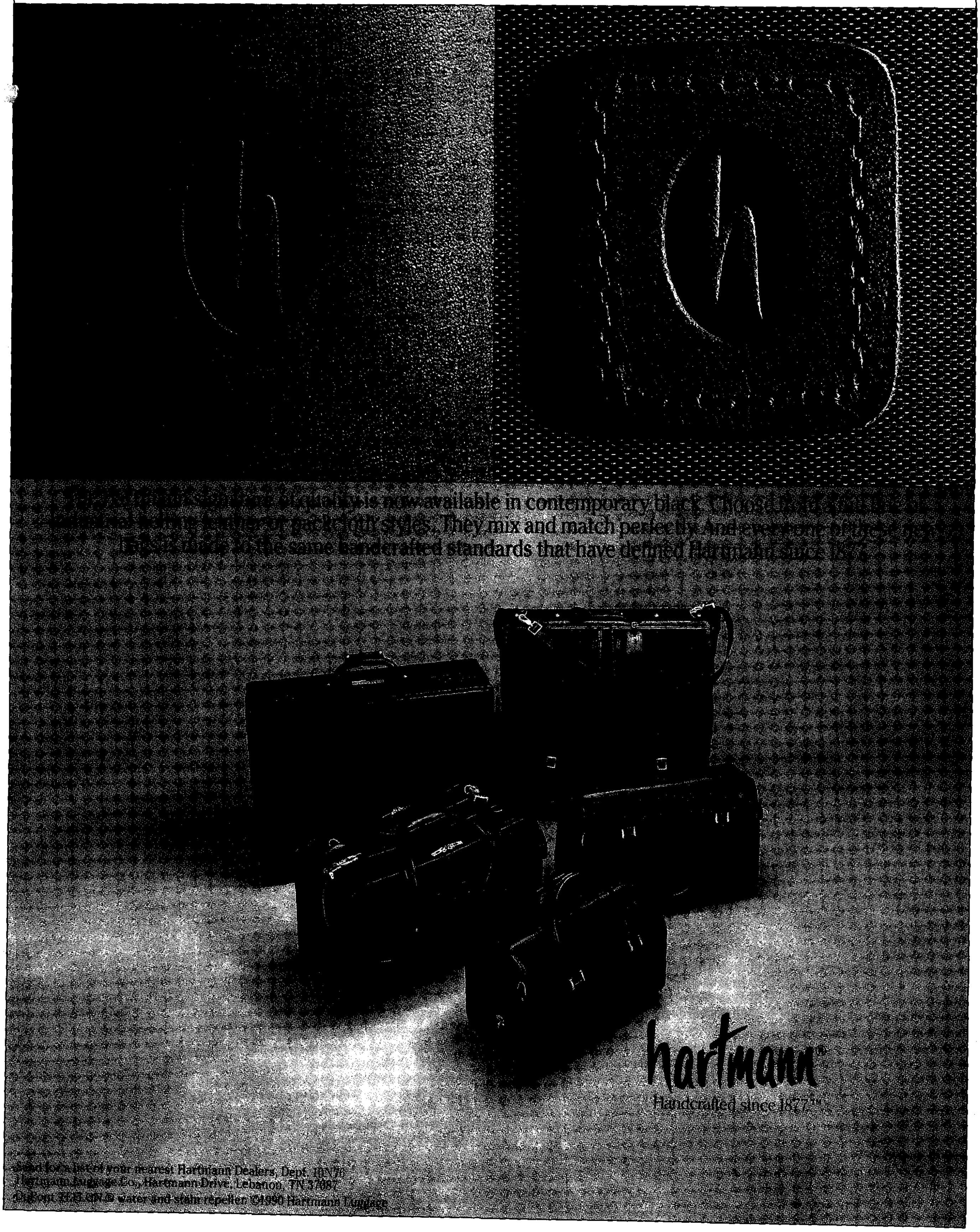

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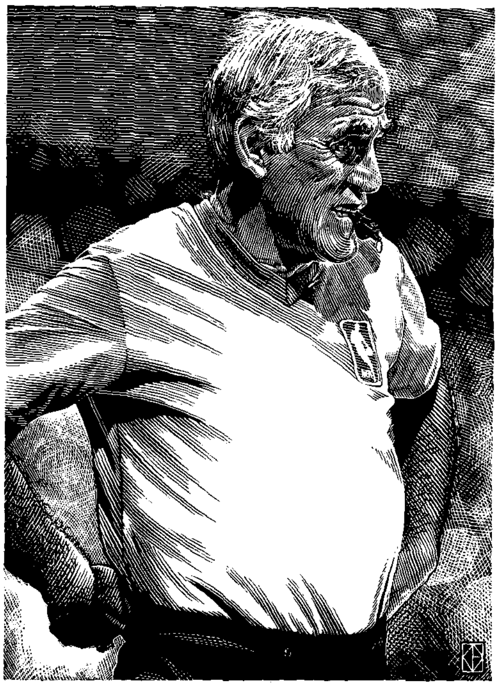


LAST April 6th, Earl Strom, a stocky, silver-haired man of sixty-two, stepped onto the court at Madison Square Garden to officiate at a game between the New York Knicks and the Philadelphia 76ers—a group of ambitious young men who were generally half his age and almost half again his size. For Strom, the dean of National Basketball Association referees, this would be the last of more than two hundred nights on the job at the Garden. Over the past thirty-three years, he had seen basketball evolve from a waltz-paced and virtually all-white game played by two-hand set shooters into the gliding, anti-gravitational, inner-city-inspired version of the sport, which made pro basketball one of the growth industries of the nineteen-eighties. Strom had presided over the game's greatest teams and most incandescent players, and had also made a little basketball history himself. Had he been a player of equivalent stature, or even a coach, the evening might have lent itself to sentiment: a heartfelt introduction to spur the fans into a standing ovation; a ceremony at halftime with gifts from the Retirees' Catalogue (a rocking chair, a Lincoln Town Car); a chorus of long goodbyes from the guys who knew him when. But a referee remains isolated even in his valedictory, and not a word about Strom's leave-taking would pass the P.A. announcer's lips. They would have to miss him after he was gone.

It was a bad time for nostalgia, in any case. The six-month regular season had come down to its last few weeks, and the all-important playoffs—"money time," in Magic Johnson's phrase—loomed. Both the Knicks and the 76ers were playoff-bound, but there all likeness ended. After struggling since February, New York craved what had been depressingly rare of late—a win over a good opponent—to help it regroup for the postseason. The Sixers, meanwhile, had won eight straight games and flown to the top of the Atlantic Division. They were eager to kick a Knick or two while the New Yorkers were down—a desire strengthened, no doubt, by the memory of the 1989 playoffs, when the Knicks had celebrated a three-game sweep against Philadelphia by sweeping the court with a push broom.

From the moment Strom tossed up the ball at center court for the opening tap, it was evident that this game had "playoff intensity," as the sportscasters say. The pace was fast, the errors few, and the physical contact unbridled. Most of this contact was, if not strictly legal, at least within the N.B.A.'s usual limits: a crash against an opponent's hip and thigh to carve some turf closer to the basket; a tug at his jersey or waistband, the better to keep him earthbound; even the occasional push (applied discreetly, at the small of the back) to force a man out of the play. But midway through the first quarter, with the Knicks owning a six-point lead and the ball, New York's Patrick Ewing sidled over to cut off the Sixers' Charles Barkley and thereby free a Knick forward on offense. This was a moving pick—technically a foul but often overlooked by the officials. Unhappy with the obstruction, Barkley threw Ewing to the floor.

Ewing is listed at seven feet and two hundred and forty pounds, and isn't shy about throwing that weight around. Barkley, six five and two fifty, is famous for his raw power, startling speed, and manic flair. Neither man is much good at retreating, and it was no surprise when Ewing jumped up to challenge Barkley. The two shoved each other once, then again, and Ewing went sprawling to the floor a second time. Other players stepped in to intercede, and, just as the incident seemed to be over, into the fray jumped a third large man: Charles Oakley, the Knicks' resident enforcer, who'd been shelved with a broken hand, and was watching from the bench in his street clothes. Glowering, he moved toward Barkley and appeared, as the league office noted when it later fined Oakley fifteen hundred dollars, to be "serving as other than a peacemaker." (Barkley was fined the same amount, for "instigating the altercation," and Ewing was dunned five hundred dollars for "adding to the fight.")

Earl Strom had had enough. He had already whistled Barkley for a technical foul, or "T'd him up." Now he did the same for Oakley, and summarily threw him out of the arena; Strom pointed dramatically toward the locker room several times to make sure that Oakley and everyone else got the point. Then he called the players from both teams into a huddle and launched into a profanity-laced scolding, loud enough for their coaches to hear. "I told them that people had paid money to see the greatest players in the world, not to see a bunch of hoodlums out on the floor, punching and shoving," Strom recounted to me after the game. "I told them that I was going to toss the next guy who as much as raised his hand to scratch his head."

It was a classic Strom solution. A less experienced or less confident referee might have overreacted and bounced Barkley from the game as well, thereby compromising the 76ers' chances and damaging the show. But Strom had managed to restore order while keeping the teams' stars in action. His masterstroke was the ejection of Oakley—a strong statement with no effect on the game's outcome. And by issuing *two* technicals Strom cancelled the free throws that such fouls ordinarily call for, and dodged another potential distortion of the final score. The play resumed with no loss of fervor, and no further incidents. The Knicks won, as they deserved to. And Strom packed his black leather uniform bag and moved on to his next assignment, in Charlotte —another stop on a mostly unacknowledged farewell tour.

"I like Barkley," Strom told me a few days later. "He has a lot of enthusiasm, and he does a lot of things out of his anxiousness to perform so well—he's not a vicious individual." Many N.B.A. referees privately admire some of their more wayward charges. But in Strom these feelings seemed to run deeper—toward affection, even protectiveness.

Though Strom is old enough to be a rookie's grandfather, he has kept a young man's looks, save for a few mild furrows in his forehead and some faint crow's-feet around his eyes: his hair is still thick and bristly; his eyebrows are bushy and black. Strom's complexion reddens when he is provoked or exerting himself, and he has deep-set hazel eyes, which flash in a moment's heat. In civilian life, he frequently wears aviator glasses, which soften his face, but on the court he wore contacts, and his features came at you in waves: fleshy nose, full mouth, large teeth, and, not least, magnificent lantern jaw. When he confronted an obstreperous coach or player, that jaw was a jutting edifice—a target that could never be touched. (He was punched just once in the line of duty: it happened more than twenty years ago, when Richie Guerin, then with New York, swung at an opponent and struck the referee instead.) Strom is spreading slightly about the middle, but his body remains firm and compact, down twenty pounds since he began following a low-cholesterol diet, six years ago. He has thick forearms and wrists, large hands, and blunt, untapered fingers—the better to punctuate an unpopular call, something he did more flamboyantly than anyone else.

Strom is not a stylish runner (there is a slight shuffle to his gait, and his elbows flap out from his sides), but his legs, toned by years of off-duty jogging and by the five miles he covered during each game, are lean and sinewy. Over the past several years, those legs charted new ground every time he stepped on the court: no one else had refereed major-league basketball for as long as Strom had—more than three thousand games, in five different decades, before he finally retired, last June—and no one else had stayed active beyond his sixtieth birthday.

Strom has been called the Kareem Abdul-Jabbar of referees, but the analogy is inexact. While Abdul-Jabbar faded noticeably in the last year or so of his unparalleled career, Strom performed agelessly to the end. This past season, when he might have drawn Social Security, he worked as brilliantly as he had in the past—undaunted by nightly races with some of the fastest young athletes in the world, or by the mental strain of making a hundred instant judgment calls a game, or by an itinerary that exceeded seventy thousand miles of air travel annually. If he lost a step over the years—something that Strom denies ("I was *always* slow," he says)—he compensated with anticipation and positioning, and with an iron will to excel.

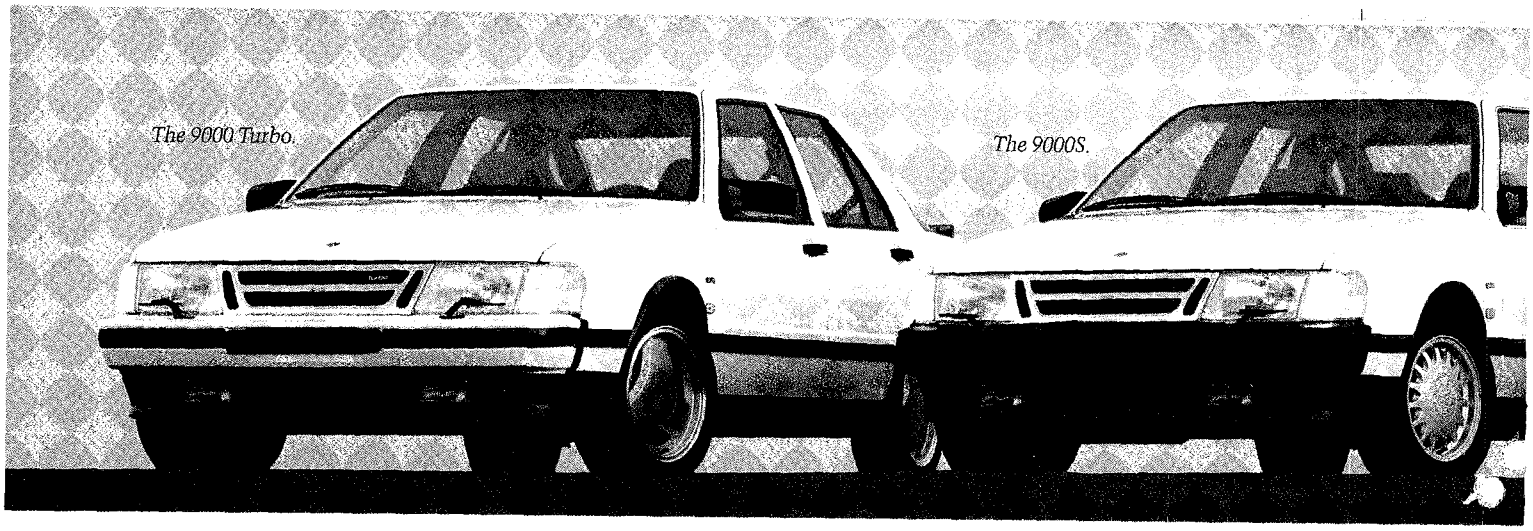
Strom's stamina is famous even by N.B.A. standards. In June of 1985, during the fifth game of the Celtic-Laker championship finals, the temperature in Boston Garden reached ninety-seven degrees. Abdul-Jabbar took oxygen from a portable tank and still played miserably. Strom's partner, Hugh Evans, had to be replaced in the second half. Strom, then fifty-seven years old, just chugged on, never missing a beat, his face only slightly pinker than usual. Throughout his long career, Strom missed two games, and one of those came when a granddaughter had meningitis. In 1974, after an off-season knee operation, he came back at full tilt two months earlier than his doctor had projected; in 1977, he worked through the protracted N.B.A. playoffs with a stress fracture in his foot. To this day, his sole concession to age remains a two-hour afternoon nap.

Strom was a star official in the early sixties—the era of Sid Borgia and Mendy Rudolph, celebrity referees who ruled the fledgling N.B.A. with arrogance, theatrics, and impeccable judgment. He was *the* star official of the nineteen-eighties, despite the recent vogue for low-profile, by-the-book types—"robots" and "clones," in the eyes of scornful old-timers. Like one of those rare silent-film actors who thrived in the talkies, Strom lasted through six supervisors, five commissioners, three professional leagues, and two generations of players: he reffed Dolph Schayes, a star forward with Syracuse in the nineteen-fifties, and Dolph's son, Danny, now with Milwaukee. In 1988, when *USA Today* polled the N.B.A.'s players and coaches to choose the league's best referee, Strom won in a landslide, with eighty-three votes out of a hundred and ninety-three cast. (His supporters mostly cited his consistency and his fairness, particularly toward road teams, but one player said he voted for Strom because Strom reminded him of his grandfather.) Finishing second, with forty-three votes, was Jake O'Donnell, who had risen to prominence only after Strom jumped from the N.B.A. to the American Basketball Association, in 1969. Darell Garretson, Strom's supervisor, placed a distant third.

The results surprised no one. According to a prominent team official, Strom had been perennially rated first by the N.B.A.'s coaches and general managers in their reports to the league office. For twenty-five of his last twenty-six years in the league, he worked the N.B.A. finals—the only mark of excellence that mattered to Strom, because it not only translated into national network exposure, not to mention more money (Strom is a free spender and an extravagant tipper, and a bulldog for every check), but reflected his unique and unconditional acceptance among coaches and players—the single overriding criterion for any official's success.

"He was the only ref who was relaxed enough or confident enough or crazy enough to come over a minute before tipoff and tell you his latest dirty joke, or ask you what you were doing after the game," Ted Green, a writer for the sports daily *The National*, said recently. "Most referees approach the business with some kind of fear—a fear of losing control, a fear of not being respected, of showing you're too human, of having anyone perceive you as being biased. Earl seemed to have got beyond all those fears."

In the last phase of Strom's career, his acceptance allowed him unparalleled flexibility in handling the occasional player challenge. Two years



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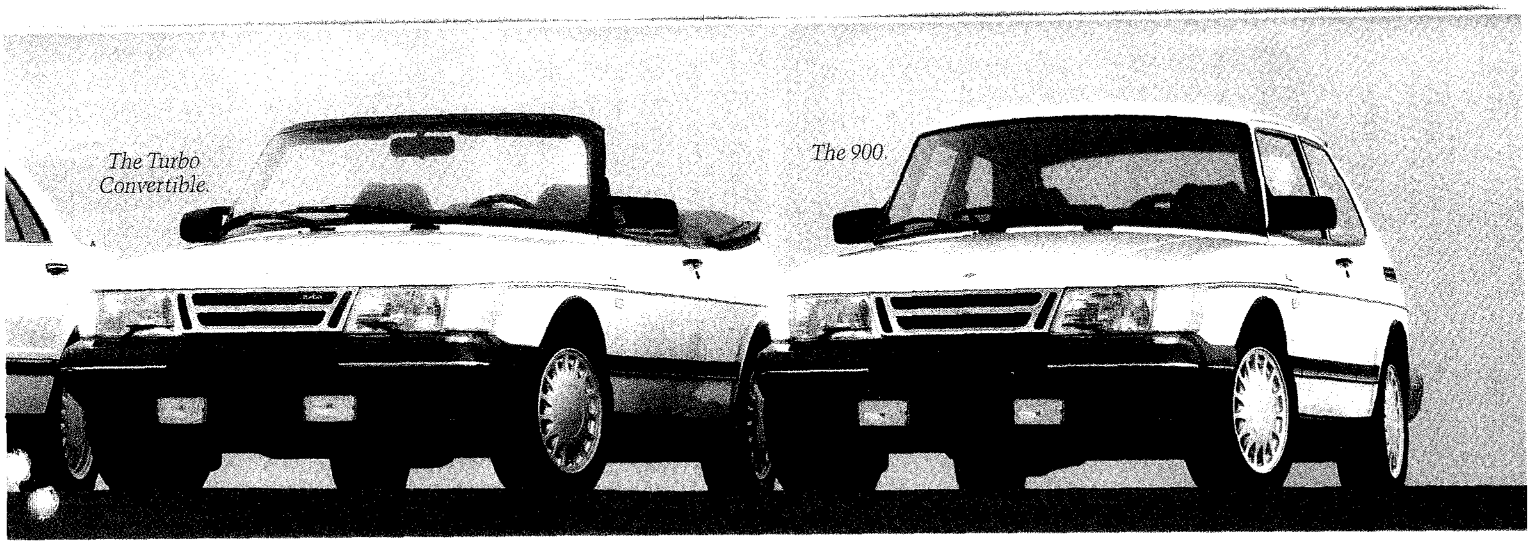
It's the only European import with enough interior passenger space to be rated a "Large" car by the EPA. And, with the rear seat folded down, enough cargo space to rival a station wagon's.

In short, a sports sedan designed for full-fledged humans, instead of the one-dimensional version that conventional carmakers seem to have in mind.

The Turbo Convertible resembles no present-day car so much as the classic top-down roadsters that

*MSRP, excluding taxes, license, freight, dealer charges and options. 900 shown with optional light-alloy wheels and fog lamps. Prices subject to change. **Whichever comes first. © 1990 Saab Cars USA, Inc.



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The 900 is a direct descendant of the Saabs that first made their mark on Europe's great rally circuits.

Yet it's set apart by considerably more than its pedigree. In the continuing refinement of the Saab 900, this year's version comes equipped with a larger 16-valve, fuel-injected engine, anti-lock braking system, driver's-side air bag, and countless amenities. Yet it begins at only $18,295.* A sharp contrast to car prices that stretch both budgets and credibility past a breaking point.

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So if you're in the market for a 1991 automobile, the wisdom of comparison shopping all but mandates a visit to a Saab dealer.

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ago, in Milwaukee, the home-town Bucks coasted into the fourth quarter with a thirteen-point lead over the Phoenix Suns. But Paul Mokeski, then the Bucks' reserve center, was aggrieved. While boxing out his man and getting ready to rebound a Phoenix shot, Mokeski had been diverted by a forearm to the head. Even though the shot went in, and there wasn't any rebound, Mokeski wanted a call for such presumption, and he didn't get one. As he lurched upcourt toward his own basket, he complained to Strom, loudly enough to be heard at the courtside press table, "You're going to have trouble down there if you don't call that."

A typical N.B.A. referee counters such threats in one of two ways. The first is simply to ignore the protest from behind a wall of authority—to say, in effect, "Don't bother me." The second, used if a player or coach carries on too long or abusively (a standard defined by the official's threshold at that moment), is to sting him with a technical, which brings with it a hundred-dollar fine. (In extreme cases, when a player or a coach reacts to a technical with yet more verbal rage or with some other display—throwing a sports jacket on the court, for example—a second technical is called, grounds for automatic ejection and an additional, hundred-and-fifty-dollar fine.) There is a third course, a middle road, but it is expressly prohibited by the *National Basketball Association Official's Manual:* "No game is to be stopped while the ball is in play to warn a player or coach regarding his conduct. If any interruption is necessary then call a technical foul. Do not stop the action for a warning!"

That, however, is what Strom proceeded to do. He threw up a hand to freeze the clock, then met Mokeski at a spot near the Milwaukee foul line. "I'll start calling it, but I didn't see that one," he said.

"But it was very obvious," Mokeski insisted.

"It was obvious to you, but not obvious to me, O.K.?" Strom said, his nose nearly scraping the player's collarbone, and with a hint of menace in his voice.

The interruption of play had now stretched to fifteen seconds—an eternity in basketball—and Mokeski squirmed, and said, "Are you done?"

"No, I'm not," Strom replied. "The next time you open your mouth, I'm going to throw your ass out of here." He marched the ball out of bounds and blew his whistle to resume play. Officially, nothing had happened.

"Other guys would probably just call a technical," Mokeski said afterward. "They wouldn't talk to you or try to explain, but we get frustrated, just like the refs. At least, Earl gave me that much respect."

EARL STROM was born on December 15, 1927, in Pottstown, Pennsylvania. His parents were devout Orthodox Jews from Eastern Europe, who had settled on the south side—the "wrong" side—of the Reading Railroad tracks. His father, Max, was a foreman at Prince's Bakery—"the greatest Jewish-rye-bread baker of all time," Strom says. Earl, the last of seven children, was pampered, and encouraged in his passion for sports. He was never fleet or particularly nimble, but by the time he reached high school he was a heady player, the type who sensed game strategies ahead of his mates. In baseball, he was a smooth first baseman—"a major-league glove with a ten-cent bat," a big-league scout later told him. He started at center for his high-school football team, which is still remembered fondly in Pottstown for defeating its arch-rival, Norristown, in 1944, for the first time in forty-five years, setting off a Strom-led snake dance through the streets of the town.

Basketball was a source of deep frustration for Strom when he was in high school. "I was the greatest practice player in the world," he says. "I'd be very aggressive, I'd fight and scratch, I'd make tremendous passes behind my back—I was ahead of my time with those. But, come the game, I would clam up. I wouldn't attempt the things I could do in practice. I was tentative, afraid of making errors. I never started, though I played a lot off the bench. It was a letdown. I always felt I was better than what I did, and better than what the coach thought I was, and that used to gall me."

"He hated to lose, and he had a temper when things went wrong," Hank Stofko, one of his former teammates, says. "As tough as he is as an official, that's how tough he was on officials as a player. He was always being thrown out of games."

It couldn't have helped that Strom's family was in turmoil. His father had

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always had a weakness for schnapps, and by the war years he had become an alcoholic, bouncing from one bakery job to another. "All four of my older brothers were gone—enlisted, two in the Marine Corps, two in the Army," Strom told me once. "I'm in the tenth grade, and here I am at home with my mother and two sisters, and we're getting calls from the police station to bring my father home. He was a happy drunk. He wasn't arrogant or abusive —he was always a nice man—but it was humiliating for me to have to go to the tavern to pick him up."

Knowing he would be drafted after graduation, Strom enlisted for an eighteen-month hitch in the Coast Guard on the last day of 1945. He was stationed in Groton, Connecticut, and there his heroics at practice landed him on the base's basketball team and exempted him from onerous duty. When the eighteen months were up, Strom went back to Pottstown and knocked around for a month or two, took business courses at a nearby junior college, and eventually landed a job in quality control at Jacobs Aircraft. Basketball remained his passion, though, and he joined a semi-pro team called the Erntex Knitters, which was sponsored by an underwear manufacturer. Strom had matured as a player, but he still gave the refs grief. One night in 1949, the Knitters were holding their own against a stronger team, thanks mainly to Strom, who, for a change, could not miss a shot. In the middle of the second quarter, he jumped into a scrum for a loose ball. The sole referee that night, a respected college official named Pete Lewis, was slow to respond. "I was digging for the ball, and it seemed to go on for *minutes*," Strom told me. "I looked for Pete, and I saw him all the way at the other end of the court, and I said, 'Yo, the game's up here. Get the hell up here!' So he not only came up but he threw me out of the ballgame. In those days, the referees dressed with the players, and Pete came over to me after the game—he was an older man, who wore long johns and those pinch-nosed glasses—and he said, 'You know, young man, you're never going to make it as a player, but you seem to want to be a referee. Why don't you take up refereeing?' I said, 'You know, after watching your exhibition tonight, I don't know why I shouldn't.' "

Lewis eventually became Strom's mentor, helping him crack the better high-school leagues and the college circuit, but from the beginning Strom worked tirelessly on his own. "I felt I had the talent, but I knew I had to be seen," he said. Over the next five years, he officiated anywhere: in church leagues, in Y.M.C.A.s, in junior high schools. He moonlighted as often as six nights a week from his job at Jacobs, travelling sixty miles or more each way to ref in Pennsylvania towns like Coatesville and Warwick. He worked industrial-league games in empty fire halls, in drained swimming pools, and in one gym where a potbellied stove stood at one end line. He took on rural high-school doubleheaders for a package fee of seven dollars and fifty cents. And he cherished every minute. "It kept me close to the game I loved, it gave me a sense of accomplishment, and we needed the little bit of money I made," he says. (Strom had married Yvonne Trollinger in 1952, and the first of five children was born to them a year later.) "Basketball refereeing came very easily to me. Pete Lewis used to tell me, 'You were born to referee.' "

If anything, the young Strom was excessively creative. When in doubt, he blew his whistle. "I would crouch down and look for things to happen. I was like a cop, and, for some reason, people liked that," he says. They liked it less when Strom made a tough call against the home team—especially in the fevered industrial-league gyms. Hank Stofko recalls, "People came out on Sundays to see the locals slaughter the opposition. There were egos on the line, and players would tackle someone and not believe they committed a foul. I don't know how many times I had to get between Earl and some guy because they were ready to punch each other." Stofko went on to coach high-school ball, and when he drew Strom as a referee he came to rue his old crony's integrity. "I never got a break," Stofko says. "Earl was divorced from everybody on the floor, and he called the game the way he saw it. It became like a religion for him."

ZABAR'S
ZABAR'S
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M.IAN

In 1956, Strom moved on to a customer-relations job with General Electric's missile-and-space-vehicle department in Philadelphia—an hour's commute from Pottstown. He also began working the college-basketball circuit. His schedule, never leisurely, became so frenetic that his family would lose track of him for days at a time. On a typical day, he would get to his desk by nine. His boss would let him leave early for a two- or three-hour trek to some outlying arena. After the game, Strom would often drive straight back to the office and grab four hours' sleep at his desk or in the visitors' lounge. Then he'd get up, shave, don a clean shirt, and usher a flock of Air Force colonels around G.E.'s latest nose cone.

Officiating paid Strom as much as eighty-five dollars a night, about a third of his weekly salary, but he would probably have done it for nothing. When, in 1957, he was assigned to a St. John's–George Washington game at the old Madison Square Garden, at Eighth Avenue and Forty-ninth Street, he felt like a provincial tenor called to La Scala. "I was scared to death," he said. "I got to the arena a couple of hours ahead of time, put down my bags, and went out and stood in the middle of the floor. I was the only guy there."

That summer, Strom received a letter from Jocko Collins, the N.B.A.'s supervisor of officials, inviting him to attend the league's preseason camp in October as a candidate referee. Strom leaped at the chance, though he knew that the pros paid less than the colleges (only forty dollars a game), and offered no security and scant benefits. The advent, three years earlier, of the shot clock, which required a team to attempt a shot within twenty-four seconds, had made the pro game more to Strom's taste—fast-paced, hard-nosed, athletic. The N.B.A. was only eight years old then, and had just eight teams and minimal television exposure; it used show business to lure fans from the more established (and more sedate) college game, and referees were an integral part of the show. The archetypal vaudevillian was Matthew P. (Pat) Kennedy, an official so popular that his

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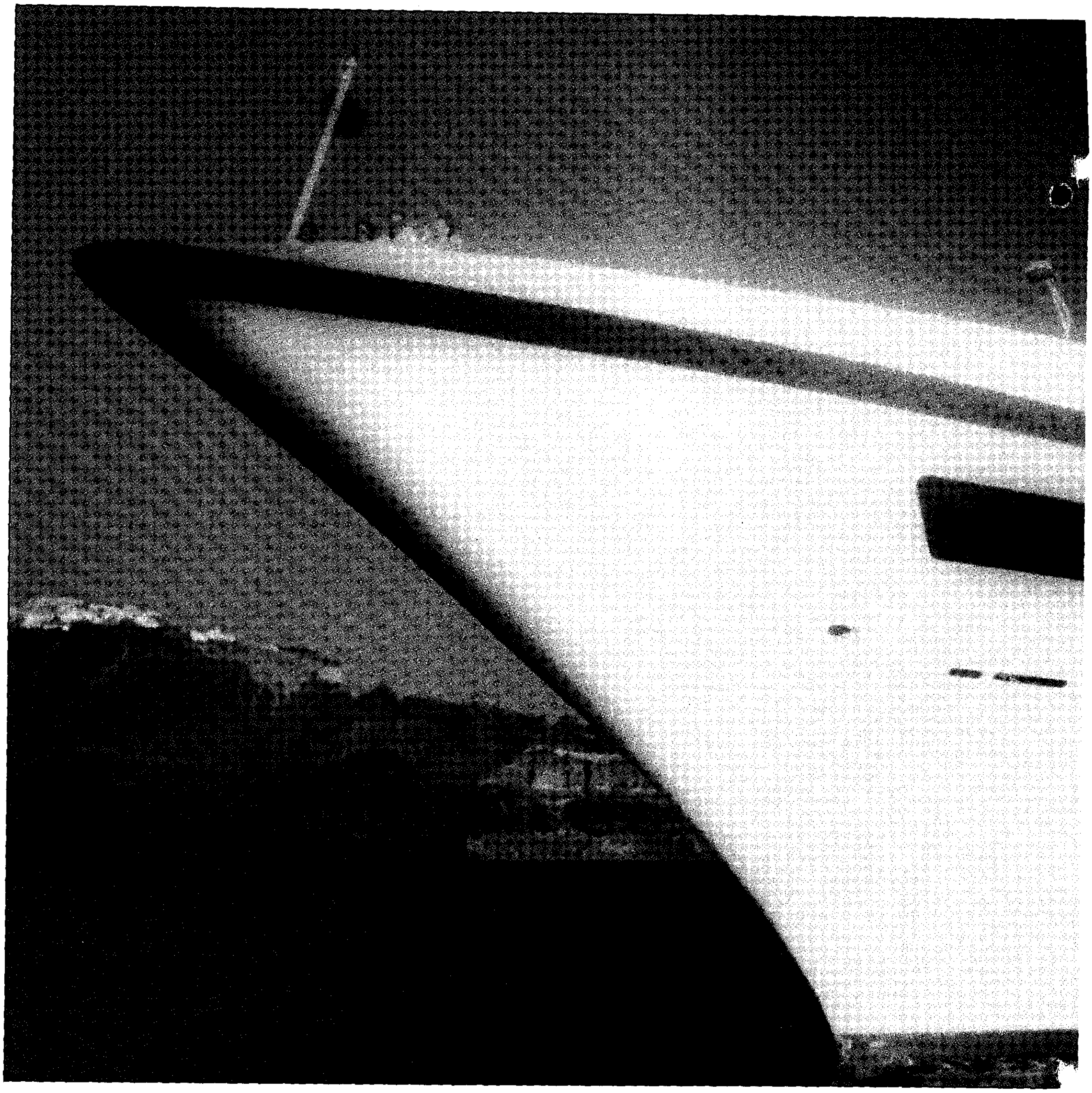

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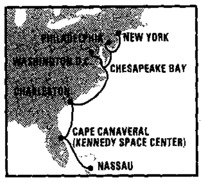
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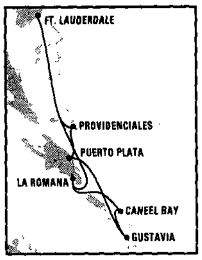
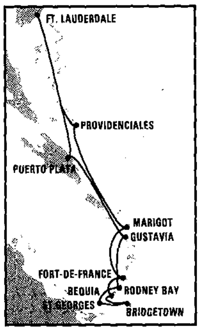

FT. LAUDERDALE
PROVIDENCIALES
PUERTO PLATA
LA ROMANA
CANEEL BAY
GUSTAVIA

CARIBBEAN/ST. BARTHS
10 DAYS
Oct. 26—Nov. 5, 1990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MARIGOT
GUSTAVIA
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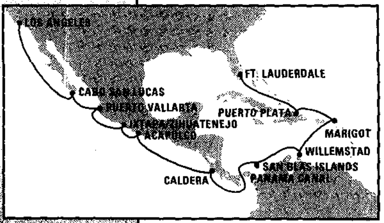
RODNEY BAY
ST. GEORGES
BRIDGETOWN

CARIBBEAN/BARBADOS
7 OR 14 DAYS
Nov. 5—Dec. 17, 1990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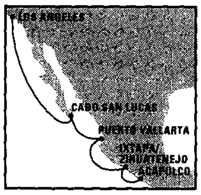
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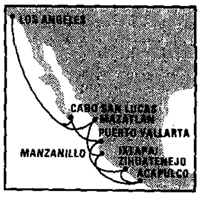
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name was posted on the Madison Square Garden marquee whenever he was working there. Kennedy cut an imposing figure on the court: he was six feet one, with slick black hair, fair skin, and a chest that strained his zebra-striped shirt. But he is best remembered for a Shakespearean baritone, and for treating the most innocuous foul as a plot against God and country. He would sprint to the scene of the crime while whistling frantically, then whirl, point to the offender, and yell loud enough to be heard in the farthest mezzanine, "No-no-*no-no*-NO-*NO!* You-*you*-YOU-*YOU!* It's-no-*good-you*-STAY-*HERE!*"—or, more simply, "I *caught* you *this* time!" But Kennedy was more than a burlesque act. His flamboyance veiled his competence and the fact that he had set a new standard for professional officials. (He left the N.B.A., in 1952, to play straight man for the Harlem Globetrotters, but soon hated the charade.)

Kennedy was gone by the time Strom reached the pros, but his spirit pervaded an élite corps of eleven referees, including the choleric Sid Borgia; the patrician Mendy Rudolph; Norm Drucker, known for his soothing manner toward outraged partisans; and Arnold Heft, a.k.a. the Growler, who could outyell any coach alive. At the first officials' meeting that fall, Strom was excited but not overawed. He thought he had found his proper level, and he felt at home. He heard Collins and the rest echo his own evolving viewpoint: that a referee must weigh a rule's intent, and not merely its language, before making a call.

After watching Strom work a single exhibition game, Collins offered him a job for the season. Strom agreed, with the understanding that the league would squeeze his N.B.A. schedule around his college and high-school assignments and his day job at General Electric. (Moonlighting was then the norm among the N.B.A.'s referees, for few could support themselves on its piecework wages.) According to Strom, his transition was seamless: "Other rookie refs were blowing fouls on everything and anything, but I didn't blow myself into trouble. I was almost immediately accepted."

His former colleagues tell a different story. They say that Strom was cursed with "the college disease" during his first two years in the N.B.A., and was dubbed the Pied Piper for his compulsive whistling. "When Earl Strom started, he wouldn't let a mouse move," Borgia told me. "He blew more than a dozen referees."

The N.B.A.'s first commissioner, Maurice Podoloff, who, in 1946, had come to basketball from minor-league hockey, knew that physical contact, and even an occasional fight or two, would hardly poison the gate. Since the pros already had the superior talent, and their twenty-four-second clock enforced a brisker rhythm, the officials' duty was to avoid fixing a product that wasn't broken. The commissioner knew that basketball is best when it's played non-stop—when one play builds to the next and a team's hot streak, or temporary confusion, creates surges of scoring. Too many fouls chop up the narrative, drain the game's kinetic energy, fence its flow.

The philosophy of the day, which was generally adhered to into the seventies, was for a referee to call as few fouls as possible while keeping the proceedings reasonably clean, safe, and free from mayhem. Dirty play was frowned upon, because it could injure a player or set off a melee, and also because it favored brute strength at the expense of artistry. Hard, aggressive play, on the other hand ("benign roughness," in one sportswriter's phrase), was to be encouraged, because it made the feats of skill—the bullet pass, the off-balance shot—all the more remarkable. "A good official lets them play to the fullest within the rules," John Nucatola, who supervised Strom in the seventies, says. "You let the players get to where it teeters right on the edge, where it's almost getting out of hand, and you *hold* them there."

The pro rules of the day were somewhat vague about defining a foul, and many top college officials foundered in their N.B.A. tryouts. Pro officials were taught to judge events on the basis of their *relevance*, not their mere occurrence. The pro official allowed a play to develop; he momentarily delayed his call in order to decide whether the contact mattered. Even in today's more whistle-happy game, officials have a three-word motto that tells everything about a referee's ideal relationship to his whistle: "Suck to succeed."

No one has ever mastered the pro call

better than Sid Borgia, the raspy-voiced, bald-headed dandy who was Strom's mentor at the start. Though Borgia was famous for his temper, he reigned with surpassing common sense. He used the rule book of the day as his guide, not as his master, and when the book fell short of clarity or elaboration—and that happened often—he gladly filled in the blanks. For all his improvisations, however, Borgia's greatest impact on the game came from the calls he didn't make. He truly believed in the motto "No harm, no foul" (although some say he pushed it to another level: "No blood, no foul"). Borgia delighted in vigorous rebounding and bruising defense, and he refused to penalize their practitioners. If the contact wasn't flagrant, he didn't see it. The book on Borgia was simple—bang first and bang often—and his games were often inspired chaos. (A generation later, Borgia's bias toward the defense was reflected in Strom's pronounced tendency to call a charge—a foul against the offensive player for initiating contact with the defender.)

Unlike his colleagues, Borgia was a full-time N.B.A. referee, with nothing to fall back upon, yet he was widely considered the strongest of a sturdy bunch—the least likely to be intimidated by a badgering coach or a home crowd. When the natives grew restless at his seeming perversity, he shouted his next call all the louder. Once, when an enraged fan ran out of the stands and challenged his courage, Borgia summarily decked him. "A referee has to be hungry or crazy," he has said, "and I was a combination of both."

If Pat Kennedy brought style to the N.B.A. and Borgia brought it courage, then Mendy Rudolph—Strom's other great teacher—added an element of class. Known as Mr. Hollywood by the players and fans, Rudolph was suave, debonair, always above the fray. He was indeed Hollywood handsome, and he lit up many a hotel lounge when he sat down impromptu at the house piano. But Rudolph was most elegant—and most influential—on the court, where his expressive hands and lithe body made every call an event. He knew just how good he was, and how much a strong official added to the game. He was fond of saying, "There are really twelve performers, not ten, out there." In 1972, three years before Rudolph retired and seven years before he died (at the age of fifty-three, from heart failure), Robert Vare offered this depiction of him in the *Village Voice:* "Mendy doesn't just approach the scorer's table to signal a foul. He performs a veritable pas-d'action en route, a successful if hybrid mix of minuet, mazurka, and mambo. When he hands the ball to a player at the foul line, his movement suggests a matador executing a complete arc with his cape."

Rudolph was no less courageous than Borgia. But where Borgia was apoplectic, Rudolph under siege was the image of hauteur. His colleagues admired his judgment, aped his mannerisms, and envied his on-court reserve. Strom was especially close to Rudolph, and he reveres his memory. "Mendy almost danced through a call, he did it so smoothly," he says. "I could never begin to do it the way he did."

In assessing his N.B.A. career today, Strom acknowledges that he never needed to break new ground. He was, rather, the supreme synthesizer of an

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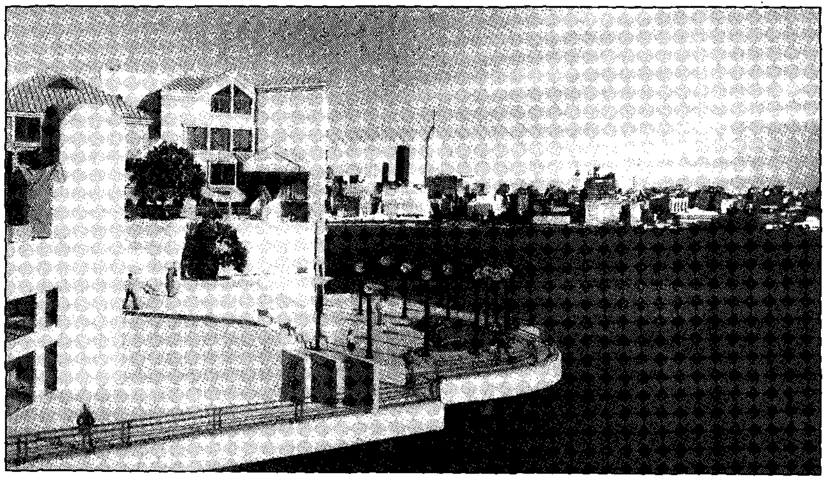

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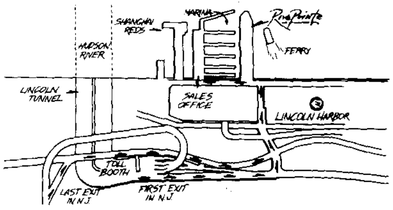

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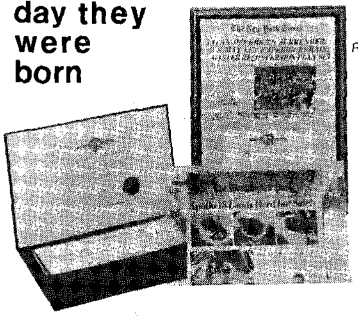

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established tradition. "When I came into the league, everyone had his own idiosyncrasies, his own personality, and I didn't try to emulate any one particular guy," he says. "I tried to fit in certain things from all of them. I picked a little bit here, a little bit there, and I developed my own style." For all his pride, he was receptive to criticism from the veterans. "I wanted to *learn* to be a good pro referee, and I came in with an open mind," he says. "I knew there was a difference from the college game. Mendy used to say to me, 'Hold up on your whistle, because you're going to see things up here you never dreamed of.' I'd see Elgin Baylor go up right at a man, and I'd *know* it was going to be a charge, but just as I was going to blow my whistle he'd twist around the guy and lay it in, and I'd think, Jesus Christ, I don't have a foul. When I called a play, no matter how right I thought I was, if Mendy came up to me—or Sid or Arnie or Normie—and said, 'That wasn't a good pro call,' I'd say, 'Fine, tell me why.' "

AFTER his first year in the N.B.A., Strom knew where his future lay, and he dropped his college and high-school games. He was a quick study, and by his third season, when he was assigned to the playoffs for the first time, he knew, as Drucker put it, "when to lay off and when to blow, when to let a play ride by." In his fourth year, Strom worked all five games of the championship series with Rudolph, an unprecedented distinction. Still, Strom's growing acceptance didn't mean that his job was easy. The league office (shared by Podoloff and a single secretary) was notoriously weak, and the team owners behaved like feudal lords. In St. Louis, the Hawks' front mid-court seats, known as "murderers' row," were the preserve of the team owner, Ben Kerner, and his general manager, his lawyer, his mother, and various loudmouthed members of his entourage. When Kerner was annoyed by a call, he would scream at the offending official, "You'll never work here again!" Moreover, the N.B.A. of the nineteen-sixties was far rougher than it is today. The game was generally slower then, and the big and less mobile men had more time to get their licks in. A cheap-shot maestro like Clyde Lovellette would seize a better position for a rebound with a strategic elbow to the other man's trachea. Almost every team had a "policeman"—a hulking center or forward who would protect the star scorers.

More vicious than the owners and more violent than the players were the people the referees feared most of all: the fans. The atmosphere of an N.B.A. arena in the sixties was somewhere between the blood lust of minor-league hockey and the partisan frenzy of World Cup soccer. Though the crowds were smaller than those for baseball or football (in 1960, a typical game might draw seven thousand), they sat much closer to the action, and could target their traditional scapegoats, the officials, with both taunts and projectiles. On different occasions, Strom had to dodge eggs, oranges, an empty whiskey bottle, a dead flounder, and a man's shoe. A hurled coin took a chunk out of one of his contact lenses in Detroit; in Syracuse, a woman reached out from her front-row seat and stuck his rear end with a hatpin.

In the pre-expansion league, a given referee might work twelve games or more in the same town in one season—an arrangement that allowed fans to develop deep-seated grudges. The rooters were wildest in the more provincial cities, like Fort Wayne, Indiana, where spectators would pull the leg hairs of opposing players as they passed; St. Louis, where the typical obscenities became brutally racist after the league was integrated, in 1950; and Syracuse, where a "bad" call was a civic affront, and a rare home loss was a call to arms. "The fans were on the edge of violence, and certain things just toppled them over," Drucker says.

Strom took it all in stride. "It was the nature of the job," he says. "When the home team lost, it was always the referees' fault, and you always had to fight your way off the floor." And since a uniformed escort was only an occasional courtesy at the time, the officials had to run a literal gantlet to their dressing room. They coped with the assault in various ways. Some undid their belts and wrapped them around their hands, with the buckle protruding as a makeshift brass knuckle. Strom refused to wear a lanyard and instead carried his whistle in his hand (a habit that stuck), the better to avoid the likes of the Syracuse Strangler, a husky thug whose ploy was to loiter above the runway to the dressing rooms, then reach down and throttle any official within arm's length. On one occasion, Strom recalls, the Strangler snared a hapless referee named Charlie Eckman—"picked him right up by his neck, until Charlie's feet were dangling," he says. "He was actually hanging the fellow."

Many college officials couldn't handle such rough-and-tumble; either they "swallowed" their whistle in clutch situations or they quit after a game or two. But Strom thrived on the challenge—he had always loved to be right, no matter how many people disagreed—and showed from the start that he wouldn't be a "homer." In his very first N.B.A. season, he made the point clear to the Brahmins of Boston Garden. It happened late in the game, when the Celtics were far ahead of Philadelphia and the great Bob Cousy was making one of his patented drives to the basket. "He takes off at the foul line and puts the ball around his back—not once but twice—and Bill Russell's man comes out to check him, so Cousy passes to Russell, who slams it home," Strom recalls. "Now the place goes crazy, until they hear my whistle. I call Cousy for walking, and the place is really going nuts—they're throwing anything that's not nailed down. So Cousy comes up to me and says, 'Hey, Earl, in the Pottstown Y.M.C.A. that's walking. When I do it here, it's not walking.' So I say, 'Bob, if you don't get away from me I'm going to nail you.' He looks at me and says, 'You don't have the guts.' I call a T. He says, 'You don't have the guts to throw me out.' Now he's really testing me. And before Mendy could get to me and say no, no, *no*, I say, 'You're out of here.' Well, now it really gets bad. Throwing Cousy out of Boston Garden is like telling the Pope he's got to leave Rome. Cousy's smiling, and he gets his jacket and walks out. The place goes wild. They win by twenty, and we need extra police to get us out of there. It was a hell of a début. But you know what? I earned Cousy's respect. And I didn't mind the jeering—that's what you call recognition."

The fracases didn't always end so well. After a playoff game in Baltimore in 1962, Strom broke his thumb while slugging a spectator who had hit him in the face with a paper cup; he worked the rest of the playoffs in a hand cast that was molded to fit a basketball. A few years later, he touched off one of

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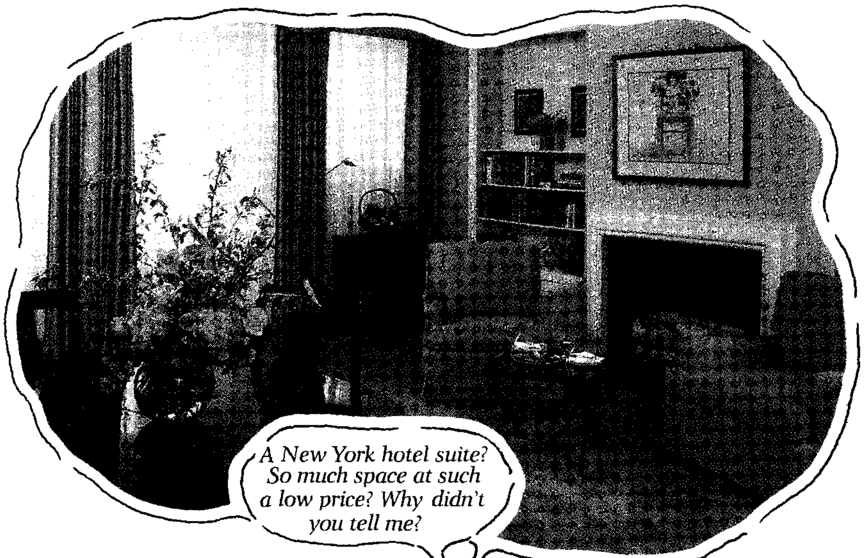
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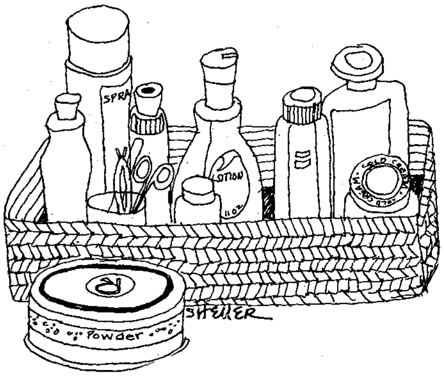
his most celebrated rows at a game between Philadelphia and St. Louis in Memphis, a hotbed of Hawk fans. St. Louis was down a point in the closing seconds, and the Hawks' Richie Guerin stole the ball at midcourt and raced to score what would have been the winning basket. Jerry Gross, a radio broadcaster for St. Louis at the time, remembers the scene vividly. "As Guerin drove to score off the backboard, he was one second late," he says. "Earl could have made a marvellous homer call and allowed the goal, but instead he blew the whistle and disallowed the basket, and the Hawks lost. Earl started to trot off the floor, and suddenly a Hawk executive named Irv Gack—he was a short, squat, very outspoken person—came running down the stairs and yelled, 'You stole it from us! You're nothing but a crook, and you're a lousy ref to boot!' So Earl turned around to chase the guy, and Gack turned back up the aisle, crawling up the stairs like a centipede with Earl in hot pursuit, and all the fans were chasing Earl and throwing peanuts."

It was a scenario for disaster. If Strom had had his way with Gack, he would probably have punched his way into a suspension. If the fans had got to Strom, they might have left him in pieces. Fortunately, the protocol of the day called for visiting players to aid any referee in extremis. That night, Strom's champion was none other than Wilt Chamberlain, Philadelphia's gigantic center: he hurdled the scorer's table, hoisted Strom by the back of his shirt ("He picked me up like a saltshaker," Strom said), and carried him, puppy-dog style, to the door of his dressing room. "You owe me one," Chamberlain told him.

"I was young and impetuous and I did a lot of dumb things," Strom acknowledged years later. "I was just a red-ass. I was an angry person, for what reason I don't know." Nonetheless, incidents like those confirmed Strom's reputation as the greatest "road referee" of his day—the uncommon official who would make certain that the two teams had an equal opportunity for victory. This is no small trick in professional basketball: the home teams win about two of every three games year after year, so consistently that handicappers routinely cede them up to four points a game. Travel fatigue figures in this bias, since a basketball road trip is a series of one-night stands and dawn departures, but no savvy observer underrates the impact of a raucous home crowd upon the average official, especially when it comes to making a marginal call in the fourth quarter.

BETWEEN his job at General Electric and the interminable flights (from Philadelphia to St. Louis was a five-hour run in those days), Strom had little time for sleep and less for his family. His children, whom he doted on and indulged, teasingly referred to him as Uncle Daddy. They were proud of his fame but were generally embarrassed by his antics on the court. When they attended games he worked, "we'd pretend he wasn't our father, so the other people wouldn't yell at us," Susan, his second daughter, says. "Something always seemed to be happening when he was reffing." (The exception was Strom's eldest, Margie, who would root tirelessly for her father from the stands, and whose loyalty went beyond lip service, as Strom found out after he and Norm Drucker presided over a rare Celtic home loss in the playoffs. "We had to walk across this big lobby at Boston Garden to get back to our dressing room," Strom told me, "and all the people are shouting obscenities and spitting at us. All of a sudden, I hear this commotion behind me, and I turn around to see Norm bashing this guy up against the wall. I go back to break it up, when one of the guy's friends takes a swing at Norm. I catch his hand and I hit him and break his glasses, and now I'm pounding *this* guy against the wall. Then I hear my guy yelling 'Ouch, *ouch!*' and I look down, and there is my eleven-year-old daughter, Margie, in her first pair of wedge high heels, kicking the guy in the shins.")

In times of domestic crisis, Strom was usually away, and the load fell on his wife, Yvonne. She was the full-time tutor, counsellor, chauffeur, and disciplinarian, and, like so many women of her generation, she accepted the arrangement, though not without occasional protests. The Stroms live in a five-bedroom Colonial stone house, which was built for the family twenty-five years ago in suburban Chester County, about five miles from where Strom grew up. When his grown children (and grandchildren) pay a visit, they tend to settle in the sunny family room, where a stained-glass nature scene, crafted by Yvonne, fills the stone hearth. Strom is very proud of her work. "Yvonne is so bright—she could have been a doctor, a lawyer, anything she wanted," he says.



"At first, his refereeing was just a hobby that brought in a little extra income, and even when he began to travel more, to be away on Christmas and Easter, it didn't matter that much," Yvonne said recently. "He told me he would give it up if I really wanted him to, and I said, 'If you give it up we'll break up, because you won't be able to live with the fact that I asked you.' I got caught in the old web. I know the N.B.A. is a male-dominated organization, but when I think of it I think of a female. You know why? Because it's always been a rival in terms of time and priority."

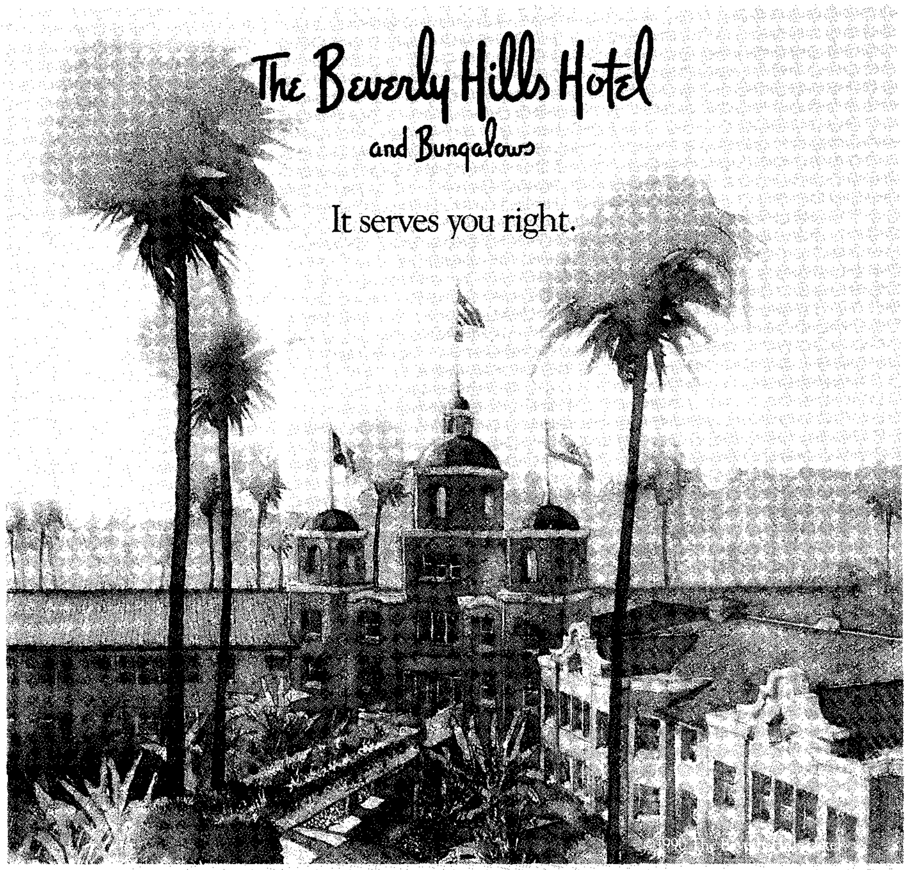
Strom nodded solemnly, and voiced his own regrets. "I put my career ahead of my family many times, and I paid the supreme price of not seeing my children grow up," he said. "When I look back at it, I was very unfair. I would never do it again."

By 1969, Strom, then forty-one, had reached the top of his profession. He was a special favorite of the commissioner, Walter Kennedy (who never questioned his outlandish expense vouchers), and he was paired with Rudolph for almost every crucial game. A portrait from that period, painted for a home-town dinner in Strom's honor, now hangs in the family room. It shows a man in his prime, resplendent in the referees' old-style, black-and-white zippered shirt. (Strom never approved of the switch to today's plain gray jersey, which, he used to say, "makes us look like gas-station attendants.") Holding a basketball, the subject stares straight ahead, unflinching, his mouth stretched wide in a cocky smile. His self-assurance is almost palpable. It's hard to imagine that within months that man would plummet so low as to question his purpose, and even his sanity.

At that time, the American Basketball Association, a two-year-old venture fighting to survive—and, ultimately, to force a merger with the N.B.A.—was busy pillaging the older league's player stock in a series of celebrated bidding wars. In September of 1969, to gain further credibility, the A.B.A. offered then unheard-of money to five senior N.B.A. referees, Strom among them—a twenty-five-thousand-dollar signing bonus, a salary of twenty-five thousand per year for three years, and additional guarantees for the playoffs. To Strom the decision seemed obvious. If he reënlisted with the N.B.A., he stood to make sixteen thousand dollars that season, and little more for the playoffs; in the A.B.A., he would make more than fifty thousand. The N.B.A. supplied no life insurance, no job security, and virtually no health plan; the A.B.A. offered all three. Not least, Strom would finally be able to afford to quit his job at General Electric and resume some semblance of a normal family life.

After a meeting with A.B.A. representatives at a hotel at Washington's National Airport, Strom, Norm Drucker, Joe Gushue, and John Vanak all jumped ship and signed a three-year contract. (Rudolph, the fifth referee, decided to stay with the N.B.A.; rumor had it that he'd received a sweetheart deal.) Kennedy, who had balked at matching the A.B.A. offer, shot off a three-page telegram to the defectors, branding them as ingrates and worse, but Strom didn't care. He was sure that the jump would eventually improve conditions for all professional officials. "Before that, referees were necessary evils," he says. "This established our value—we had something to sell." Strom's analysis proved to be on the mark; by the time he rejoined the N.B.A., four years later, the senior league had lifted officials' salaries above the A.B.A. levels. (This past season, Strom made a hundred and eleven thousand dollars during the regular season, with thirty-five thousand more for the playoffs.) Nonetheless, he counts his move to the A.B.A. as his worst professional mistake.

In its nine-year existence, the A.B.A. enlisted some brilliant talents, such as Connie Hawkins and Rick Barry, and some big-name coaches,



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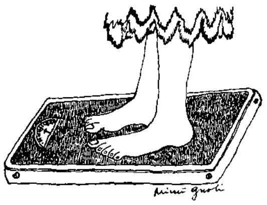
such as Alex Hannum and Bill Sharman. Play was wide open, if undisciplined, and was spiced by innovations like the three-point shot—later adopted by the N.B.A.—and a red-white-and-blue striped ball. The sparkle, however, was essentially cosmetic, and the big money was never there. From the start, the team owners had planned to make a limited investment, and parlay a quick merger with the N.B.A. into a big capital gain. But the new league's impact was diluted because of its exclusion from national television, and many of its franchises were less than stable. (By the time the merger did take place, in 1976, only six A.B.A. teams had survived.) The upstarts played in substandard, even seamy, arenas; Strom's first A.B.A. game was at the Dinner Key Auditorium, in Miami, where the urinals overflowed and the handyman slept in the referees' dressing room. The gate was well under a thousand, and the game's highlight came at halftime, when the ball girls stripped to bikinis.



Strom called Drucker after the game that night, and Drucker recalls, "I thought I'd have to commit him to an institution. I spoke to him every single day that season—I was his psychiatrist. He didn't smile that year. You cannot imagine what he went through. His first complaint was 'There were only four hundred people at the game last night.' And my standard reply was 'Did you receive your check last week?' But Earl needed the press and the glamour. He was totally out of it, and he did a lousy job. I used to watch him work, and he wasn't the Earl Strom I knew. He wasn't blowing, he wasn't on top of the plays, and the players were saying things to him that the old Earl Strom would never have allowed."

In reviewing his A.B.A. years, Strom called himself "a walking nervous breakdown." On off days, he would oppress his family with such constant complaining that Yvonne finally made him see a real psychiatrist. That didn't help. At one point, Strom asked Drucker to convey to the brass his plea for an early release from the contract—he was ready to return his bonus, do anything they wanted—but the A.B.A. was unwilling to give an inch in its struggle with the N.B.A. Strom was reduced to pumping his friends for the latest word on a possible merger, and, in the end, to serving out his three years. "My heart wasn't in it," he concedes. One of the few pleasant moments came at a 1971 exhibition game between the Virginia Squires and the Kentucky Colonels, at which Strom noticed a skinny rookie forward with a modest reputation and a wild Afro. "I'd never seen anything like it," he says. "He'd glide through the air and dunk the ball or dribble behind his back and pass off the dribble, and he was just so fluid. The next day, I ran into a reporter in Philadelphia and told him that Julius Erving was the greatest basketball player I'd ever seen in my life." The A.B.A. commissioner, Jack Dolph, fined Strom a token fifty dollars for voicing an inappropriate opinion, and Strom sent Dolph a check for a hundred dollars, with a note saying, "Here's an extra fifty, because I'm telling you also that he's the greatest player I've ever seen."

Toward the end of the 1971-72 season, Strom began negotiating his reëntry into the N.B.A.—a reconciliation strongly pushed by most of the senior league's general managers. Walter Kennedy embraced the prodigal at a meeting and made an oral promise that Strom could come back to work the next fall. But through the spring and summer the league office stalled on a contract. Then Strom heard the bad news from Rudolph: his return was opposed by several second-tier officials who had succeeded to the top spots when Strom and the others had left, and who claimed that Strom's overpowering style would hurt the morale of the corps. Kennedy took the bait, and the word came down: there would be no contract that season.

Strom retained an aggressive Philadelphia lawyer named Richie Phillips, who filed a breach-of-contract suit against the league, and, to support his family, Strom took a job as a travel agent and later opened a bar in Pottstown, where he would regale the locals with tales of high life in the N.B.A. At the same time, to keep his hand in, he worked weekend games for the minor Eastern League. In the summer of 1973, after a year of legal fencing, the N.B.A. finally reinstated Strom, in return for his dropping the suit. But relations between the league and its

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prodigal referee were never quite the same again. The N.B.A. had been a relatively close, if contentious, family; now it was a growing corporate enterprise, with seventeen teams and a media machine that hyped basketball as "the sport of the seventies." Most of the Borgia-era referees had been replaced by people whom Strom could not trust. His new supervisor, Nucatola, who had come to the N.B.A. after a similar job with the Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference, found the old ways unseemly. He forbade fraternization between referees and coaches or players at bars or hotels, and discouraged his officials from screaming at anyone during a game. Strom usually followed the first rule (he was fined at least twice, though, for allowing team personnel in his dressing room), and usually ignored the second. His competence, as always, was beyond question. But with his maverick attitude and volatile behavior he became an increasing embarrassment to the league office. Soon he set off a string of incidents that made him more vulnerable to his enemies than ever. In Seattle in 1975, during the closing minutes of a close game between the home-town Supersonics and the Houston Rockets, a young woman stood behind one basket and yelled curses at Strom. After the game ended—the Supersonics won, despite a controversial "roader" call by Strom—he walked toward the bench to retrieve his jacket and felt someone grab his shoulder from behind. "When they put their hands on me, I react," Strom explained later. "I swung around, and I caught this woman flush in the face with my elbow and drove her into the crowd. I felt bad that it was a girl, but I didn't know who it was." The woman was a friend of a Supersonic named Archie Clark, and another Seattle player, Fred Brown, rushed to her defense and pushed Strom into the crowd. Bill Russell, then the Seattle coach, dispersed the mob and saved Strom from a possible beating, but on the way to the officials' dressing room Strom got a faceful of beer from a fan two rows up. "I went crazy," he said. "I tried to climb the railing, but the guards grabbed him and put cuffs on him. I think I would have killed that guy if I'd got hold of him—that's how angry I was."

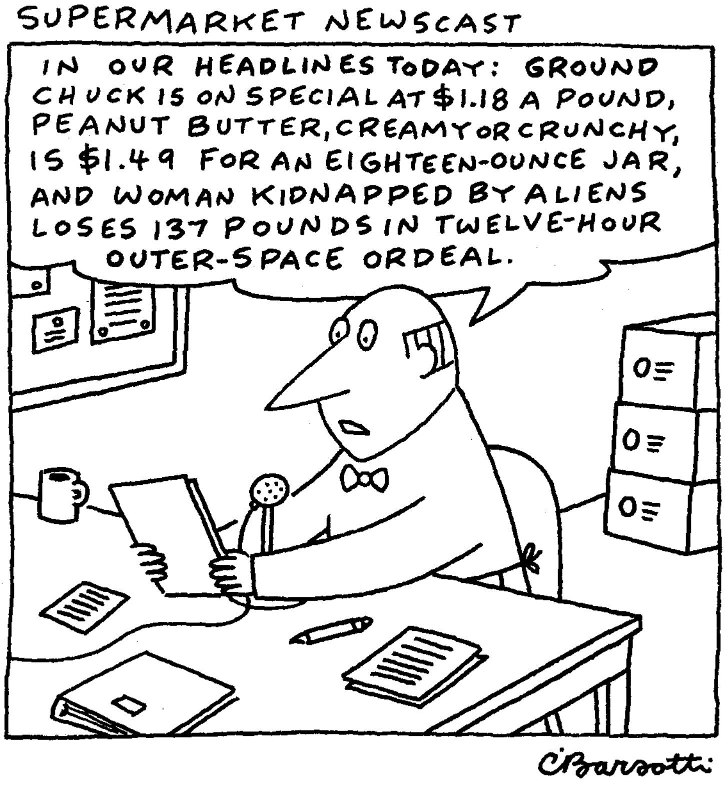
The altercation received wide coverage, and played poorly for a league office striving for sophistication. Kennedy's first inclination was to suspend Strom for the rest of the season, if not for life. After Strom suggested that he might take legal action, the commissioner reduced the penalty to a six-hundred-dollar fine. But Strom, who felt he had acted in self-defense, wasn't mollified, and his indignation grew when he discovered that Fred Brown had been fined only a hundred dollars. After the National Association of Basketball Referees failed to intercede effectively either with Kennedy or, the following fall, with his successor, Lawrence O'Brien, Strom bulldogged his way to a private hearing with O'Brien. Three weeks later, the league rescinded his fine, and Strom resigned from the association, telling Darell Garretson (then its president), "You guys never backed me, and some of you didn't even want me back. What I accomplished I accomplished on my own, and I don't need a union."

By 1977, the rift between Strom and his colleagues had widened. The N.A.B.R., egged on by its new attorney, Richie Phillips, was determined to become a full-fledged union and get a three-year contract. When the league balked, the referees voted to strike, beginning with the last game of the regular season and continuing into the playoffs. Strom was never a union man ("I always felt you should get paid for what you did and how well you did it," he says), and he still resented Phillips for charging what he considered an outrageous fee when they had sued the N.B.A. He felt a closer allegiance to O'Brien than to the N.A.B.R.'s ruling clique, which included Garretson and Jake O'Donnell. He finally decided to work during the strike, which was settled a few weeks later; he and Richie Powers were the only refs to break ranks.

"I can't truly say I was happy with myself when I saw some of my friends on a picket line and I was crossing to work," Strom said recently. "I never liked the idea of being called a scab—I just hate that word. I didn't want to be a strikebreaker. But I didn't appreciate that Richie Phillips was pulling the strings and everyone was jumping to his tune." When the strikers returned to work, Strom was unrepentant; he baited them by boasting about how much extra playoff money he had earned in their absence.

Some of Strom's friends in the business understood. "It upset me at the time," says Gushue, a longtime union carpenter who had rejoined Strom in the N.B.A., "but Earl was absolutely his own man and no one dictated to him about anything." For Phillips and Garretson, however, it was a betrayal they could not forget. Their chance for revenge came after a game between the Celtics and the Denver Nuggets in Boston Garden on November 28, 1979.

Strom worked the game with Richard Bavetta, a younger referee, whom he had tutored and befriended before the strike. At halftime, Strom criticized some of his partner's foul calls during the first half. Bavetta later charged that in an ensuing argument Strom grabbed him and tried to strangle him—a story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supported by red marks on Bavetta's neck when he returned for the second half. Strom maintained that he had merely grabbed Bavetta's jacket after his partner spewed obscenities at him, and guessed that Bavetta had manufactured the marks by rubbing a towel across his neck. O'Brien fined Strom twenty-five hundred dollars. More than a year later, Strom repeated his side of the story in an interview in *Referee* magazine, and the N.A.B.R. responded with a telegram drive (joined by everyone except Vanak, Ed Middleton, and Gushue, who by this time was retired), in which the referees asked that O'Brien not assign them to work with Strom in the coming playoffs.

At about the same time, Bavetta filed a formal grievance against Strom, alleging that the latter had tried to destroy his "effectiveness as a referee," and had caused him and his family "severe emotional strain." After a hearing that September, the N.A.B.R.'s executive board placed Strom on probation for three years, barring him from union meetings. Once again, Strom sued, and this time he won outright: a federal-district-court judge nullified the probation, noting that Phillips and the union had failed to supply Strom with a specific written charge before the hearing. The decision was upheld on appeal in 1984, and the matter was finally dropped.

While Strom's adversaries couldn't bury him, they certainly damaged his equilibrium. After Garretson succeeded Drucker as Strom's boss, in 1981, Strom was fined repeatedly for minor violations. He was more thin-skinned than ever, more apt to provoke a player into a technical or to make a bizarre call against a vocal home crowd. It reached the point, Bob Ryan, a sports columnist for the Boston *Globe*, has said, where Strom's appearance came to be dreaded through much of the league: "He had a growing reputation of being highly arbitrary and cantankerous. He was too determined to show who was in charge—the Judge Roy Bean approach—and he had taken it too far."

One of the great virtues of longevity is that you can outlast your enemies' anger, and even your own. As Strom approached his sixtieth birthday, he evolved from an aging bad boy into a hallowed, if eccentric, institution, and tempers and jealousies abated. Phillips left the N.A.B.R. in 1983 and

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was replaced by Richard Markowitz, Strom's personal attorney. (Strom finally joined the union when it became a closed shop, and actually walked a picket line during a brief strike shortly after Phillips' departure.) Garretson seemed to realize that Strom wasn't after his job as supervisor, and the two even learned to tolerate each other. Rod Thorn, the new vice-president for operations, came to appreciate the nonconformist's value; as the Gushues and Vanaks retired, and the younger veterans failed to approach the same level of public acceptance, Strom became particularly prized for the authority he brought to big games. As Nucatola noted, "Earl has so many pluses that you could forgive an occasional minus."

No longer under siege, Strom undeniably mellowed. He says that the transformation was sealed in 1987, when two of his brothers died within a month. "That shook me into reality," he told me. "I finally realized that my job is just a means to an end, and I don't want to worry about it. I'm going to worry about my wife and my family, and I'm going to enjoy my life."

Others took notice of the change. Three decades after being ejected in Strom's début, Cousy, now a Celtic television broadcaster, said, "Earl maintains his sense of perspective about the whole thing. He knows what he does is extremely meaningful to the people involved—the players and coaches and general managers—and yet it's not the end of the world. It's still a child's game."

Strom had nothing to prove anymore, no wars to wage. In his last seasons, he called fewer technical fouls (only ten or twelve a year, by his estimate), preferring to douse an offender's ire with a stern avuncular warning. He no longer stole a partner's calls from afar, as he once had, although he would occasionally expropriate a tough one to spare a junior colleague from excessive pressure.

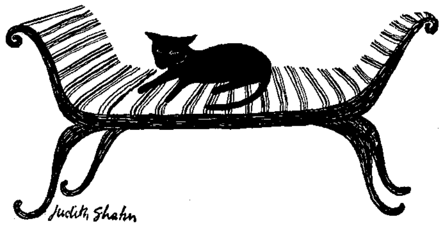
"He's a throwback, but he's right in line with what's going on today," Ronnie Nunn, a younger referee, said after working a game with Strom in Houston in 1988. "He's a griot, like in Alex Haley—the wise man who had the information. He can tell you something that no one else can. I always feel secure when I work with him, because he allows you to grow. You can make some mistakes, and yet the game is very much in check, because of his presence."

IT might seem logical that Strom should pass along his wisdom to the next generation, including eighteen rookie N.B.A. officials—more than a third of the total staff—who were hired two seasons ago, when the league shifted from two-man to three-man game crews. But after the N.B.A.'s coaches and general managers recommended that Strom be used as an instructor, the administration vetoed their proposal. At a staff meeting three years ago, according to Strom, Garretson told the assembly, "Let me explain about Earl. He's a very competent official, and his ratings are very high, but he has a unique way of handling a game—and it's so unique that I can't teach it." Nor, went the not so subtle implication, could Strom. "I have the highest regard for him," Garretson told me before declining a longer interview. "Unfortunately, we can't use him with our youngest officials, who could learn so much from him. It's a shame, but we can't use him, because he's such a renegade type. Earl thrives on controversy, and we're trying so hard to go the other way, to avoid controversy—or, at least, keep it to a loud roar."

Rod Thorn says, "I don't think Earl can impart what he does, because so much of it is instinct and feel and innate judgment. It's like Mickey Mantle hitting baseballs from both sides of the plate—how do you impart that?"

"They say you can't teach judgment, but I don't believe that, because judgment is nothing more than philosophy," Strom has said. "Garretson likes to say there's no such thing as a pro philosophy, and that's a bunch of bull. If you teach a guy when to blow the whistle, and what's important and what isn't, that dictates your judgment. That's how I learned—Mendy and Sid taught me their philosophy, and I'm no Phi Beta Kappa."

Strom's teaching ability aside, the real dispute is over the content of his curriculum. "In the old days," Thorn told me, "referees called all over the floor and did virtually whatever they wanted to do—they were stars." Now, he said, it's different: "I don't want star referees. I don't know what star referees do." The league is so allergic to publicity for its officials that it allowed Strom to talk to me only on the condition that the story be published after his retirement; it also blocked Strom from publishing his autobiography until after he had left the game. (Simon and Schuster will bring it out later this fall.)



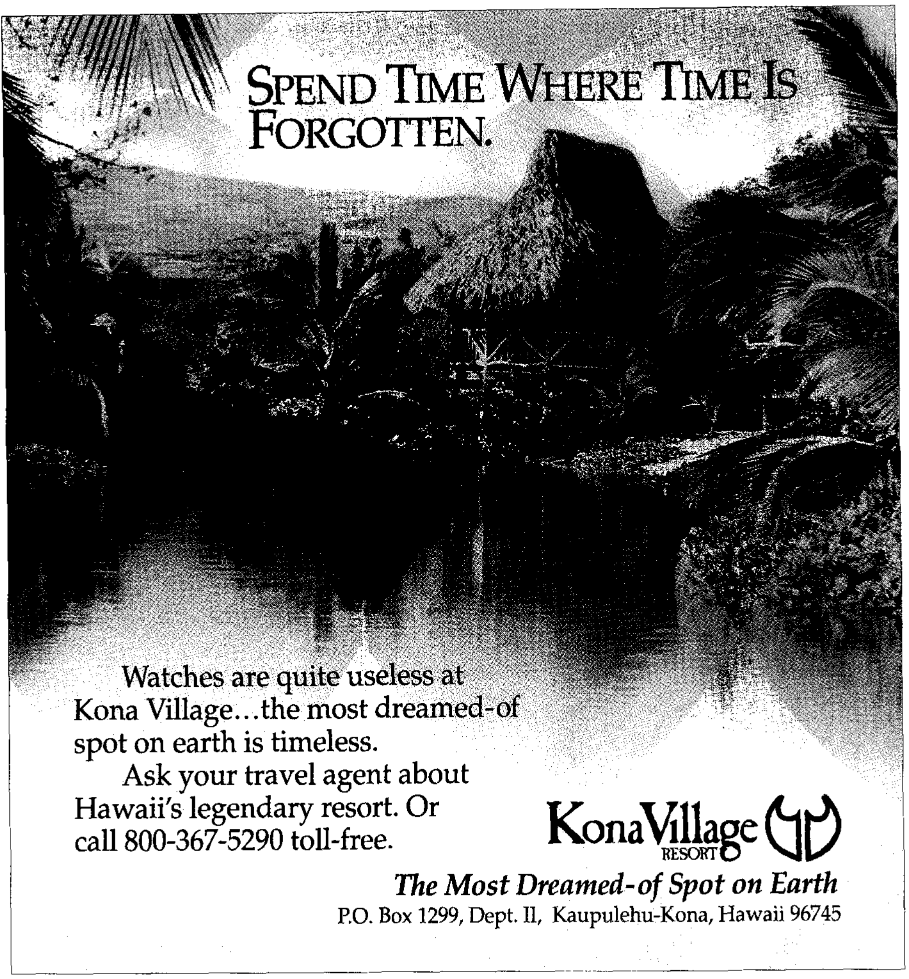
For Thorn the magic word is "uniformity." "We like to have as much uniformity as possible in our signalling mechanics, so people know what to expect from night to night," he said, and he added, "The players are the game, not the referees. The officials are there as policemen, to enforce the rules of the game. They're not there to inject their personalities into the game." (According to the *N.B.A. Official's Manual*, "authorized N.B.A. signals . . . are dignified and understandable," and "officials using unauthorized signals . . . do a disservice to themselves and to the game.")

Strom's signals were like the man himself: blunt, pugnacious, confident, and original. Calling a foul on a drive to the basket (always a dramatic moment, since the fouled player now has a chance at a three-point play), he would shoot his right arm straight up (with the second and third fingers pointing skyward), blow his whistle (*beep*), then lower his arm and clap his open right hand to his left forearm (to simulate the contact), with the left fist in the air. Then he would shift his weight with a small hop step, lower his left arm, and sweep it forward and upward in an arc of about two hundred and seventy degrees. (That was known as "the wheel.") At the end of the sweep, he would jerk his left wrist, again with two fingers extended, as if he'd touched a steam iron, to signify "and one": a foul shot, in basketball parlance. This finale was punctuated by Strom's trademark: a second, double blast (*beep-beep*)—an eccentricity he adopted from Rudolph many years ago, and one that was savored by modern players. ("That little extra tweet in the whistle gets everyone excited," the Mavericks' Lafayette Lever said recently.)

At his best, Strom would absorb the energy of the past play, then feed it back to the crowd. When he signalled a push, he looked as though he were forcing open a rusty barn door. If a player stepped out of bounds, Strom would kneel and point at the spot, his head bowed, and hold the pose for an extra beat. To disallow a score for goaltending, he would charge toward the opposite basket, his arms flapping outward like the wings of a swan protecting the brood. His signals for travelling were especially colorful, and often mimicked the offender. Once, after the oafish Pat Cummings (then with the Knicks) nearly fell down while mishandling the ball, Strom began with the standard call (a rapid rotation of the forearms around one another), then slowed his hands, tilted his torso, and took five stumbling steps, his face dragging with a drunk's confusion. At other times, he would frown or shrug while making a call, as if to regret cancelling a good play. On a technical foul, he was all majesty and defiance as he built a "T" with his arms, the thrust of his windup leading to a left-footed hop. Strom's gesticulations provided nuance and spectacle, and something more: the ability to "sell" a tough call to a restive home crowd.

IN recent years, Strom became a hard man to set off; he was no longer a red-ass. At a game at Madison Square Garden last February, between the division-leading New York Knicks and the lowly Miami Heat, the visitors kept it close into the fourth quarter—thanks both to a sluggish effort by the Knicks and to Strom's passionate neutrality. Just behind the scorer's table, in the choice seats reserved for guests of the team, a beefy man of about forty loudly scorned Strom's calls; as the score grew tighter, he was echoed by a stylishly dressed woman down the row. During a time-out, while standing by the scorer, Strom called over to the woman, "I don't mind him getting on me, because he's an idiot, but *you* I mind." The banter contained none of the heat or malice that Strom might have projected ten years before. (He even made up with the man toward the end of the game, to make sure no feelings had been hurt.)

In this period, Strom's most serious deviation, in the eyes of his bosses, was his allegiance to the old-school philosophy of letting the players play—his conviction that "some of the best calls are the ones you don't make," and that contact was "not a bad thing" unless it was flagrant. "A lot of times two guys



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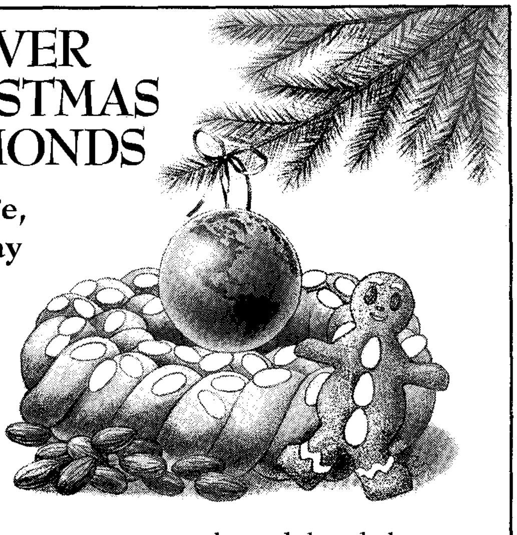

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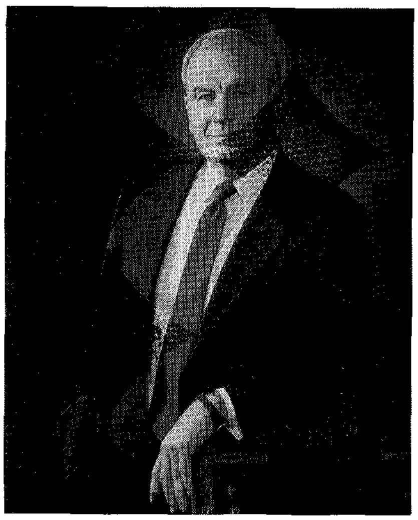

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get to the same spot at the same time—it's a tie," Strom says. "So if nothing happens, why call anything?" Strom likes to say that he could gauge the "tempo" of a game—the level of roughness and how players and coaches are reacting to it—within five minutes, and adjust his whistle accordingly. "I always had the self-confidence that I could grab the game and stop the nonsense at any time, and get them back to the point where I could let them play," he told me. "I felt I had complete control, so I didn't have to worry about whether somebody was going to get hurt. But Garretson wanted the teams to know who's boss, and for officials to blow-blow-blow so this stuff couldn't happen. He wanted you to stay tight."

Thorn freely acknowledged Strom's "terrific judgment," but claimed that the average referee would founder with so much latitude, and that fewer whistles could lead to the league's worst nightmare—a fight-related injury. "The commissioner's feeling is that we are programming and packaging a very talented group of athletes performing at a high level, and that we don't want the contact to get out of control," Thorn has said. "In the old days—when I played—there was a fight almost every night, but the players weren't as big. Now you have huge, quick people in small arenas. Basketball players do not wear shoulder pads, they're not on skates, they don't have helmets on, so fights in our game are much more serious. Over all, I would say the game is being called a little more closely than it was ten or fifteen years ago."

The question remains, however, whether play-it-safe officials will shrink the game's action until they bottle its flow. It's one thing for a Garretson or an O'Donnell to call a conservative but reliable game. It's another for a rookie to blindly follow the *Manual's* dictum: "Look for the play that *must* be called." The irony is that as a referee makes more calls for less contact he is more likely to miss a few, and the resulting frustration has led many a player to land a cheap shot. And if a player knows he will be called for even minor contact, he may hit harder—to make certain that his opponent will miss, and perhaps to make the shooter hesitate the next time.

"The young referees are overreacting," Strom said after a recent game. "They're calling things they shouldn't be looking at to begin with. If you're forty feet away from a play and I'm two feet away, no one's going to yell at me if I let it go, so why would you call it from out there? You're cutting down your percentages. And once you're stamped as a bad referee it's hard to live that down."

At bottom, the question of philosophy is also one of competence. The issue is discussed in muted tones and mostly in private, since the league shields itself from public attack on its officials with the threat of five-figure fines. Nonetheless, there is a widespread conviction among insiders that too many referees are mediocre, or worse. Even Thorn concedes that most league officials "are not great, great referees." Bob Ryan considers at least one of three officials to be "N.C. guys"—referees who have No Clue. "There are so many of them in this league that it is frightening," he says. "They haven't kept pace with the changing physical reality of the game, which is that these players are bigger and stronger and faster and they're still confined by a court of ninety-four by fifty feet. You just can't call every bump and touch at this level."

The problem is not limited to the new crop of novices. Many veteran officials "make calls that don't get them in trouble," Drucker says. "They always move to the middle stream, they never take a chance, they worry about what people will say. They don't make the tough calls, the unhappy calls."

Strom lays the responsibility for this safety-first syndrome at Garretson's door. He grants that his ex-supervisor is "a solid senior referee" and "a compulsive worker" who has greatly clarified the *Manual* and the N.B.A.'s rule book. But he also contends that Garretson recruits too many incoming officials by college reputation rather than by judgment or professional aptitude, and that he fails to give them the tools they need to improve. "I was taught how to handle an irate coach, how to handle certain players, how you handle fights, and this isn't taught today to young referees," he says. "You don't give crowds a chance to boo and scream. If you make a controversial call against the home team, you take the ball and get it in play right away, or you give it to the shooter at the foul line and say 'Shoot it.' Sid and Mendy used to say that fans aren't going to keep booing when there's a play in progress, because they're going to be intent on watching it. It's common sense, so why can't you teach it?"

In Strom's view, the uniformity campaign is a doomed effort to mask deficiencies—to keep inexperienced and less able referees from standing out. He views with similar disdain the league's 1988 move from two- to three-man officiating crews, which Thorn and Garretson have endorsed as both an infusion of youth and a check on off-the-ball (or "weak side") player contact. In fact, according to Strom, the expanded officiating corps is poorer than ever, since it contains a higher percentage of inadequately trained refs with no feel for the pro call. (Of twenty-four referees added over the last two years, seventeen were chosen from the college ranks, compared with only seven from the minor-league Continental Basketball Association, which the N.B.A. subsidizes to develop pro officials.) "They're calling off-the-ball contact more, but they're not necessarily calling it right. I never thought it was a problem in the first place," Strom says. Because of inevitable inconsistencies between by-the-book, college-trained refs and N.B.A. veterans on the same crew, he adds, "coaches get upset, players get upset." At the same time, he acknowledges that the three-man system could prolong the careers of officials whose legs are less bionic than his own.

Unlike baseball, a game of measured pauses, or football, where aggression is a ritual constant, a basketball game streams as unpredictably as Magic Johnson in a three-on-one fast break. Its emotion is wholly of the moment; the physical byplay between two players has little to do with reputation or past grudges and much to do with who pushed whom for the last rebound. The old school of N.B.A. referees rode the flow; they might try to channel or contain it, but they would never ignore it. To Strom and his forebears, a personal style was more than good show business. It was a sort of vantage point—a way to keep track of the game by responding to it directly, with honest emotion. They saw the game from the inside out. "Regardless of what they said about 'No harm, no foul,' we didn't have *half* the problems they're having now," says Borgia, who is still proud and cocksure. "We could *smell* trouble, and we knew when it was going to come. But you have to be a part of the game, and you don't see that anymore."

ON an off day toward the end of Strom's officiating career, he and Yvonne took their big Mercedes for an afternoon tour of the deserted streets of downtown Pottstown, where the mills have closed and only the banks are thriving. Yvonne pointed to a bay window above the Woolworth's on High Street, the site of their family's first apartment, and said, "It was a nice town—"

"It *is* a nice town," Strom broke in.

"—that's since gone."

Strom's thatch of hair was slightly dishevelled, and he wore his standard leisure uniform: navy blazer, gray Ban-Lon golf shirt, black Italian boots. The trees were still bare on the surrounding brown hills and dairy farms of Chester County, and the landscape was unremarkable, but the sun was out, and Strom seemed to thrive on the familiarity of it all. He is deeply rooted here. The citizens of Pottstown always stood by him, even in his renegade years, and Strom returns their loyalty. He helps out at charity golf tournaments, and speaks to local youth groups without a fee. His recent prosperity hasn't changed his tastes: he still plays at the Twin Ponds Golf Club with early retirees from Bethlehem Steel, and still haunts the Sunset Pharmacy diner, where patrons drop by his table with stories of their latest grandchild or ailment or business deal.

Strom has never itched to move from Pottstown, but he and Yvonne have been pining of late for a wintertime condominium, a place where they can tee up in February. He's getting off the court with both his health and some money—doing better than Rudolph, who died in his prime and has yet to be anointed by the sport's Hall of Fame, and than Borgia, who gets no N.B.A. pension and needs to replace an arthritic knee. Strom recently audited a communications course at Temple University, and he talks about a second career in sports broadcasting, or about acting as the league's overseas ambassador, for Europe has become a source of both N.B.A. players and lucrative exhibition matches. He surely won't sit lonely and idle, and yet, as his final game

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approached, last June, his friends and professional admirers—including more than a few team owners and general managers—tried to coax him into staying on. "Earl's still very sharp, he's quick, he reacts, he does all the things good referees do," Drucker said before Strom's decision became final. "I told him to referee until he's sixty-five. I don't think he'll quit. I know Earl—he has to be in the limelight." Strom held firm, though not without some moist-eyed nostalgia. At the N.B.A.'s All-Star spectacle in Miami last February (the sixth such game that Strom worked), he allowed himself to lapse for a moment into the pure fan's enjoyment he had always kept leashed while he was on the job. "For the first time in thirty-two years of refereeing, I found myself stepping back and watching these guys perform," he told me.

TOWARD the very end of his career, Strom came to represent a vanishing and coveted resource. In his presence, coaches and players could relax, knowing that they could focus on their own performance without worrying about the calls. Strom still had his weird moments, as when he ejected a vocal fan in Seattle who he thought was a reporter. He still enjoyed making an occasional offbeat call, just to remind people who was in charge, but he became less blatant about it. "Generally, he'd find a way to even things up," Ryan says. "No one knows how to make a game come out right as well as Earl."

As the players grew younger than his sons, Strom took to treating them as colleagues in an allied craft, whether they were journeymen or all-stars. He no longer flaunted his authority. When he picked at them during the fray ("Did you mean to miss that lay-up? Well, I didn't mean to miss that call"), it was the reproach of a harried workman, not of a distant potentate. After a player retired and league protocol was out of the way, a friendship often blossomed; Strom and Julius Erving are now staunch golf-and-charity buddies. (At Erving's last game, in 1987, Strom ignored a telephoned death threat in order to finish the contest and present Erving with the game ball.)

Last August, the depth and breadth of those relationships were in evidence at a celebrity benefit in Pottstown in Strom's honor. The guest list read like an N.B.A. honor roll from the two-hand-set-shot era to the present: Dolph Schayes and Red Auerbach, Bob Cousy and Oscar Robertson, Connie Hawkins and Erving and Larry Bird. The reclusive Bill Russell flew in on a corporate jet. And Magic Johnson paid two thousand dollars at a charity auction that night for the satin playoff jacket Strom had worn during his final N.B.A. game—a June 12th championship-round tilt at the Portland Memorial Coliseum between the underdog Trail Blazers and the defending champion Detroit Pistons.

Fittingly, a story came along with the jacket. The Pistons, already up two games to one in the best-of-seven series, had led by sixteen points late in the third quarter before Portland mounted a last-ditch rally. The Trail Blazer fans, frustrated since the Bill Walton glory days of the mid-seventies, were roaring non-stop. With little more than a second to play and his team still down by three, Portland guard Danny Young tore down the right side of the court and—just as the final horn sounded—put up a lunging shot from well behind the three-point line. The shot went in and the fans erupted, presuming that the ball had left Young's hand before the game clock struck zero—that he had tied the score, thrown the game into overtime, and handed the Blazers a chance to scramble back into the series.

But *was* the shot good? The referee closest to the ball—the one responsible for the call, according to Garretson's three-man zone rotations—simply froze on the floor. Strom, meanwhile, was still hustling upcourt from the opposite end line. Nevertheless, he drew his associates into a huddle and shortly emerged with an emphatic decision, the last call of his career: time had expired; the shot was no good. The Pistons had won the game, and two nights later they took the championship.

"A crucial call had to be made, and damn the crowd," Strom told me several days later. "There was no question in my mind—I had that call all the way. There was no way I was going to allow it to count." In the wake of this classic "roader" decision, the Coliseum din turned angry and ominous, but Strom floated through it on the way to his locker room. "I heard some abuse aimed at the other officials," he said. "But no one said anything to me."

—JEFF COPLON

A REPORTER AT LARGE

REINVENTING THE EGG

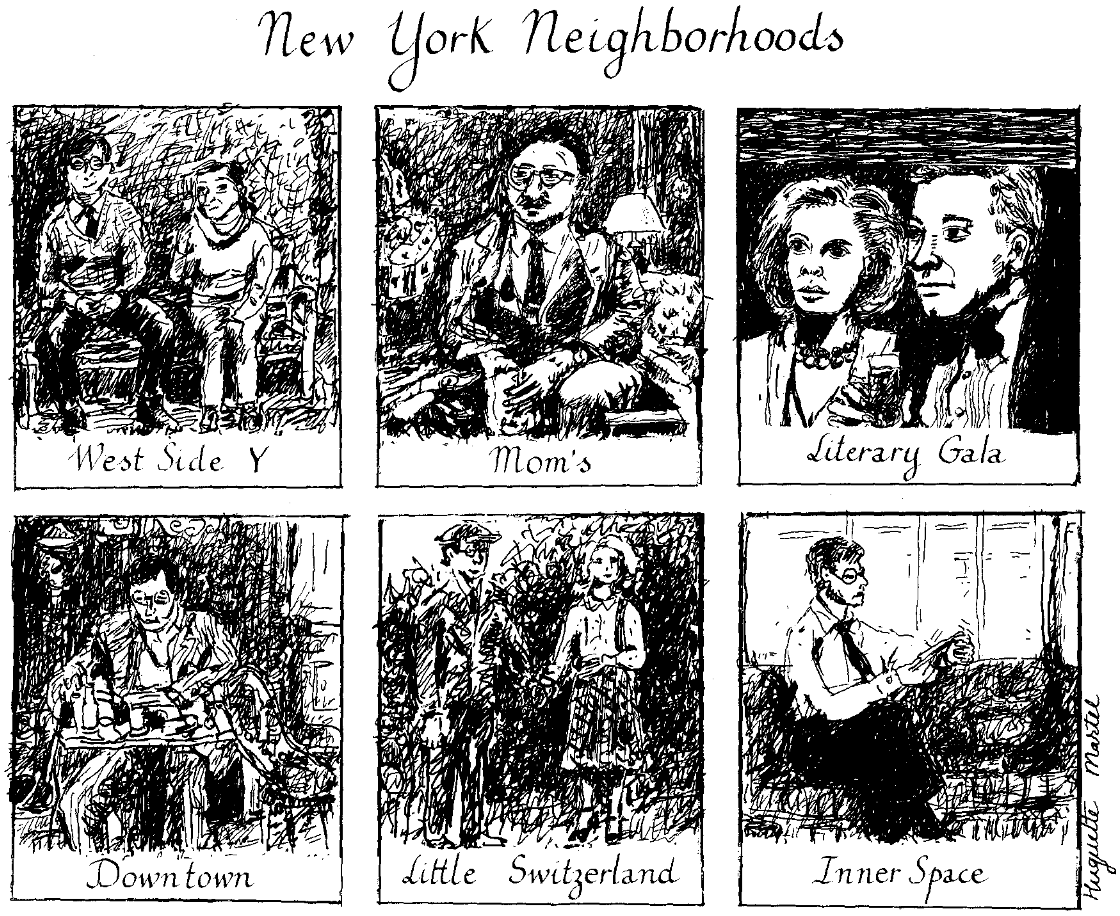
JOHN ALBRIGHT picks up an egg from the metal trough attached to the cage in front of us. "Feel that egg, how smooth it is," he says admiringly. He puts it down and lifts another. "Here's a warm one—feel that." He places the warm, white egg in the palm of my hand. There are five hens in the cage, one of which laid this egg a few minutes before, and they dance over each other in anxiety at our nearness.

The henhouse in which we are standing—near a town called Gap, in Pennsylvania's Lancaster County—holds fifty thousand caged chickens, which produce an average of thirty-four thousand warm, white, smooth eggs every day. As we stand there examining this particular egg, the soft sound of slightly agitated hens rises around us—a plaintive, unearthly cacophony somewhere between a cooing and a muted screech. The air around us is thick and sour, a little dusty from feathers and hen dander and seed mix, with a tinge of ammonia from the hens' droppings. To our right stretch two long rows of chicken cages, divided down the middle by a wooden walkway and stacked several cages high. There are five of these rows in the house, each four hundred feet long—nearly half again as long as a football field—reaching into a dusty distance. The idea of walking the length of one of the narrow walkways through the heavy air is dizzying.

To someone who has never seen a commercial poultry house before, these do not look like happy quarters. The chickens in this house do not scratch around the barnyard for seed; they spend their entire lives indoors, under artificial light, crowded into cages. They do not mate; a hen begins laying eggs at maturity whether or not there's a rooster around, so egg farmers dispense with the luxury of a resident male. And so, of course, there are none of the pleasures of motherhood for these chickens; they are not even given the opportunity to sit on the unfertilized eggs they lay. Their lives are focussed and productive: they are raised in a group as pullets, transferred to a house like this when they are between nineteen and twenty-one weeks old, and spend a year laying eggs—a total per hen of about twenty-one dozen—during the twelve or thirteen hours of light they are provided with each day. At the end of a year, when the quality of their eggs begins to decline, they are sold for slaughter, to be used in soup stock.

But when John Albright walks into this henhouse he sees a cheerful crew. "That's a contented sound," he points out. "You would hear a different level of stress in your average poultry house—much louder and higher and screechier. If we were this close to the hens in another house, they'd be literally trying to fly out of the cage in fear as we came by." Albright has invested time and money in these chickens' state of mind, becoming in the process something of a self-styled chicken psychologist. "I have not yet learned to communicate with these girls," he explains to me as we stand watching them bob nervously in their cages. "I can't give them a sales pitch and say, 'Hey, let's get in there and really lay some better eggs!' But if we make an effort to treat these girls right, they'll treat us right. You can tell from the kind of product you get from them. You treat them like dirt, like junk, like second-class citizens, and you'll get that type of egg—which, unfortunately, is the type of egg we're used to."

Albright, a solidly built man of forty-six, speaks with a slow, broad, mid-country accent. A native of Lancaster, he is not a farmer but, basically, a salesman, and he has the salesman's instinct for introducing your first name into every second or third sentence. His habit of calling his hens "girls" seems an offshoot of the same instinct: it never hurts to personalize things a



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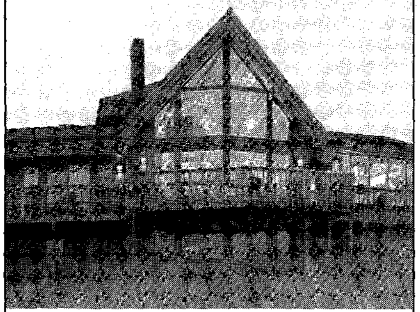

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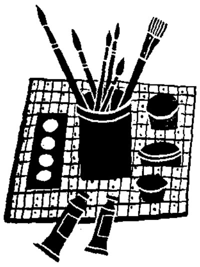
little. It was his talk about his "girls" that helped get him on the "Today" show in the spring of 1989 to describe the eggs the girls produce.

The language isn't just an affectation, though. Albright's business is founded on anthropomorphism—on the notion that what's good for human beings is good for animals and thus for the animals' "product." His aim is to reduce the amount of stress in the hens' lives, the idea being that stressed hens, like stressed people, are not a healthy bunch. "See how these hens' feet have a tinge of yellow?" he asks. "That's a sign of health; a stressed bird will have feet that are almost colorless. And notice how the comb is red? Again, in most henhouses the combs are very pale." And those stressed-out girls, Albright maintains, just can't make good eggs—eggs whose yolks stand up like hats on a firm white base, eggs encased in a strong, smooth shell without nubs and rough spots, eggs that, according to some people, even taste better. And, as a health bonus—an especially marketable one nowadays—eggs that have less cholesterol.



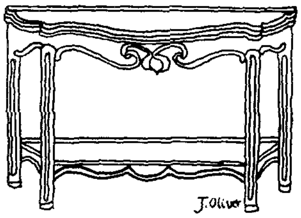
Three years ago, John Albright became the first egg marketer in the country to sell eggs labelled "lowered-cholesterol," hoping that in these diet-sensitive times people would choose them over ordinary eggs even if they cost more. And, as any good salesman will do, he has tapped into a particular emotional climate. His lowered-cholesterol eggs are a response to the public's growing desire to see food as not just a sustainer but a prolonger of life—not just as nourishment but as medicine. Never mind that creating such a product involves jiggering the composition of one of the most basic life-forms on earth—a form so wonderfully simple that it is essentially a single cell, encased in what Albright calls "a naturally tamperproof package." The prospect of such an undertaking did not faze him for a moment.

Albright has a penchant for positive thinking, and he seems to enjoy going out on a limb. Before his involvement with the egg, he worked as an elementary-school teacher, a sales, marketing, and retailing teacher at a vocational school, and an environmental-lighting engineer, and he found that he preferred running his own show. These days, he likes to tell the story of the oilman H. L. Hunt's rise to wealth: "Somebody said to him, 'Mr. Hunt, I understand you were flat broke.' And he said, 'Yeah, that's true. I sold my farm—we sold everything we owned except the clothes on our backs, a couple of chairs, and the car—and we went down the road to live in a shanty. I took all that money and bought the mineral rights to our next-door-neighbor's widow-lady's farm. I didn't even have enough money to pay the driller. I said to him, "I can't pay you, but if you come and drill, the first well you hit I'll pay you double what you get from anybody else. If you drill and hit nothing, that's exactly what you're going to get is nothing." ' When he drilled, the pressure in the ground was so great it blew the oil rig ninety feet in the air. That's how much oil was there. The first ninety-nine wells came in, but the next ninety-nine he drilled were dry. Hunt gambled everything he had on that first well. And you know what? America's the only place in the world left where you can do that. We are, in fact, the land of opportunity."

Albright had explained his latest venture to me as he steered his van through a damp morning mist on a back road to Gap. "What we wanted to do was to use technology to take some of nature's balance and bring it into the indoor, man-made environment," he said. Five years ago, he was already doing that for human beings. As the president of a small company called Environmental Systems, he was providing several hundred schools and businesses with what is known as full-spectrum lighting—lighting that attempts to mimic sunlight and is said to be more healthful and more comfortable to work under. "With lighting, we were able to bring man-made sunshine indoors in a fairly successful way, significantly reducing problems with eyestrain from computers—that kind of thing," he said. "And I asked myself, 'Is it possible for us to take this technology into agriculture and to have animals respond in the way that people respond to this more balanced internal environment?' "

To hear Albright describe it, the progress from conception to completion was an entirely logical one—but an upbeat view is part of the salesman's art. The fact is that it took two years of experimentation—efforts that veered off in unexpected directions—to create the system he calls Full Spectrum Farms. "I decided on chickens because we have about ten million layer hens in Lancaster County, so I'm kind of familiar with the egg-laying business," he went on. "We found a farmer who was willing to put our special lights in one of her two chicken houses, so that we could compare the results. What we were looking for was to have the number of eggs increase, to have the eggshell be stronger and higher quality, and to have a drop in the mortality of the chickens. Well, we got all that and one additional thing, too: the chickens laid bigger eggs quicker. A chicken, when it's in lay, will start out with eggs called peewees, then go to small, medium, large, and extra large. These chickens got to large sooner, and laid more eggs for a longer period of time. We were real happy with that. Then a friend of mine said to me, 'If the chickens are responding that well to that particular environment, do you think it could be doing anything to the inside of the egg—the quality of the egg?' And I said, 'I never thought about that.' So I started taking eggs into the laboratory and testing them against the eggs from the chickens in the other henhouse, which had the regular lighting. And that's how we started to discover some differences in the egg."

The scope of Albright's ambition expanded. What had started as simply a way to find a new market for his full-spectrum lights soon looked like a much larger opportunity. Slowly, methodically, and (unlike H. L. Hunt) with minimum risk, he began to explore the idea of producing lowered-cholesterol eggs. The egg farmer who was using his special lights had bought the equipment from Albright's company at wholesale, so that the company made no profit, and it had been agreed that if the farmer's egg production didn't improve, Environmental Systems would buy the equipment back dollar for dollar. When output improved, the farmer presumably earned back her investment, while Albright, for his part, had a living laboratory, free of charge, to devote to the development of not just a good egg but a lowered-cholesterol egg.



IN the Gap henhouse, Albright points out a box the size of a transistor radio mounted high on the wall: this is his "brainchild," an ion charger. "In a standard chicken house, you would see that there's a fog, because whenever the feed goes down to the birds dust from the feed rises into the air and circulates around, and the birds are breathing this dust all the time," he says. "Not only is it hard for them to breathe but dust is a major vehicle for disease. This ion charger kicks out negative ions, and when they hit a particle of dust, which has a positive charge to it, they neutralize it and make the dust heavier than air, which makes it drop out of the air. The device is usually used in greenhouses, to encourage plants to grow, but we've modified it for our situation, and, to the best of my knowledge, nobody else has used it in an environmental, dust-control situation.

"Then we took a look at the water, because we thought water was a major player," he continues. "We were concerned about heavy metals and—in this locale—nitrates from putting lots of manure on the ground and having that leach through into the water table. Also bacteria. All of those are bad guys. We did our best to treat the water nonchemically—without using chlorine, chloride, those kinds of things. We used ultraviolet light to kill the bacteria, and then we put an electromagnetic charge in the water, which locks up the molecules of heavy metals and nitrates, so that when the bird drinks it those items are not absorbed by the tissue of the bird but instead go right through it. And we took animal fats and chemical additives out of the feed and put in natural minerals and vitamins."

A conveyor belt that runs along the front of the rows of cages, catching the new-laid eggs as they roll out and transporting them to a central collection site, is fitted with yet another innovation: a small gadget on its motor that reduces the amount of low-level electromagnetic radiation the motor gives off. "We added these environmental elements one by one, and with each one we saw an improvement in the

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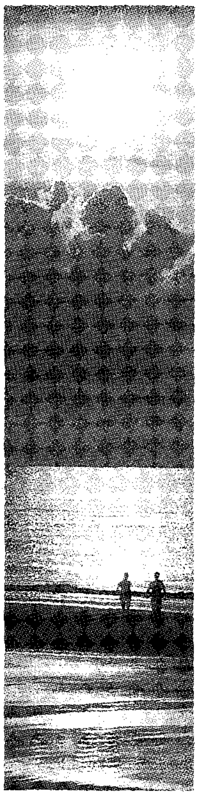

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birds and the eggs," Albright says. "It was, for lack of a better term, a mom-and-pop approach."

But it is a distinctly New Age strain of mom-and-pop—an ostensibly down-home enterprise that in fact appeals to esoteric and upscale tastes. Albright is not really going back to basics, and he is not marketing to Everyman; his system borrows its vocabulary ("stress-induced illness," "negative ions," "chemical additives"), along with its inspiration, from the health obsessions of today's élite.

Such consumers, Albright feels, are a target he understands a little better than the average egg farmer does. The farmers Albright began working with were happy to see more eggs, and bigger and better eggs, but, he says, they lacked the nerve to ask the consumer to pay more for an improved egg. As Albright sees it, it took an outsider to free them from the tyranny of the commodities market. "We knew the farmer could sell these eggs at a higher price," he says. "But the farmer didn't know that, because he's so used to selling stuff at a competitive price that he wouldn't dig in and just say no. So we started a marketing company to actually market the products for the farmer, forcing him to make a profit."

By 1987, Albright had refined his system and rounded up enough farmers—he now has about twelve—who wanted to sign on to produce his specialized eggs. He put his first batch in the grocery stores using a method of marketing as simple as his egg experiments. "We didn't have any kind of advertising budget," he says. "We had nothing that you'd expect you'd have to have, coming out on the market, for a product to be successful. Instead, we piled tons of research into the development of the product itself, and then felt we would put it on the market, and if we didn't push it and it went anyway, then we would establish a marketing and advertising plan that would take it even further. We just put it out on the shelf. And, I'll tell you, if you talk to anybody in business they will say that that particular thought process is totally fatal and absolutely will assure the failure of the product. Actually, it stunned us that we just put these on the shelf and people picked them up."

Albright's role in the business he has created is that of a middleman, contracting with farmers to provide them with his special equipment and specialized knowledge and paying them a set price for the eggs they produce under his system. He then has the eggs packaged under the Full Spectrum Farms label, in cartons that proclaim "lowered-cholesterol" and list not just the cholesterol level but the complete nutritional composition of the eggs inside (four grams of fat, sixty milligrams of sodium, and so on), a method that is familiar on a cookie package and completely surprising on an egg carton. He sells the eggs to stores at a fixed price—the retail price is generally a dollar twenty-nine, although in some markets the retailer charges more—while other egg prices fluctuate according to market pressures.

The egg industry, which Albright variously calls "stupid" and "asleep," was initially wary. "The egg industry said several things," he recalls. "First thing they said was 'This is a joke. This is a first-class joke.' Second thing was 'You can't stabilize the price of eggs. Eggs are a commodity, and that price always has to flow with supply and demand.' The third thing they said was 'You can never get a premium price for eggs, because eggs are eggs are eggs.' Then the fourth, and most important, thing they said was 'You guys are nuts, and we'll guarantee you that in less than three months you'll be out of business.' That was about three years ago."

Albright relishes the story, enjoying his role as David to the egg industry's Goliath, and he is proud of having kept his operation self-contained. His experiments in the egg business grew slowly enough to be supported by his other endeavors at Environmental Systems, with the major investment being time rather than money. "We never borrowed one penny from the bank," he says. "And I had quite a number of offers from people who wanted to put reasonably large amounts of money into our project, and I continued to resist that. Because I felt that, number one, they didn't have a real heart for the farmer, they had a heart for making money. There's nothing wrong with making money, but I could see that the farmer was going to pay the price yet again. Another major concern was that they had no real desire to provide the public with a higher-quality, chemical-free product. They were going to go right back into the same snake pit and get bit by the same old snake, except they were going to try to advertise or market it so that they could take shelf space from somebody else."

Listening to Albright talk about supplying Americans with the good food they deserve and helping farmers at the same time, you could almost forget that he is making a profit. Albright prefers to describe his real goal as going up against the huge egg farms that house two or three million chickens. ("I mean totally integrated, all the way from the gnat's hair up to the finished product. The little guy is being squeezed out, and the big guys are coming in and just gobbling up the whole deal.") Since the Second World War, the egg industry has been all but taken over by large producers. In 1949, 2,422,000 farms reported selling eggs; twenty-five years later, the number was down to 198,577. It is a classic tale of twentieth-century farming: Because of the way the commodities market is run, the small farmer—in this case, farmers with about two hundred and fifty thousand chickens—is at the mercy of every market shift, living on a precarious profit margin that can easily slide into the red. Large companies, meanwhile, can afford to absorb occasional losses. Albright's answer to this cycle is to guarantee a fixed price to the farmers who sign up to use his system. "When eggs are treated as a commodity, the consumer wins and the farmer loses," he says. "Now, there's got to be something morally and ethically wrong with that."

There is an incongruous side to Albright's involvement in the lowered-cholesterol-egg business: although he is only comfortable talking in terms of helping the farmer, fighting big agribusiness, and providing the public with a more healthful, natural product, he is nevertheless at the center of one of the most contentious, and sometimes unscrupulous, areas of food marketing today. The past few years have seen an explosion of food health claims, with manufacturers of such diverse (and traditionally non-nutritious) items as doughnuts, potato chips, and mayonnaise finding ways to trumpet "No

CHOLESTEROL!" or "NO ANIMAL FATS!" or "OAT BRAN!" on their labels. What these manufacturers—and Albright as well—are responding to is the American public's desire to have it both ways: to eat what will make them long-lived and healthy, and at the same time to indulge a powerful taste for sweets, fats, and other forbidden foods.

Ironically, a change in the regulations of the Food and Drug Administration is what allowed this proliferation of health claims and created the marketing climate in which specialty products like a lowered-cholesterol egg have flourished. In the fall of 1987, the agency abandoned an eighty-one-year-old rule under which any food product making health claims on its package had been treated as a drug—that is, exhaustive testing had been required to verify the claims. The F.D.A.'s rationale may have been that, with various government-recognized studies indicating health benefits from certain foods, it was unreasonable to make it difficult for food manufacturers to use such information in their marketing. But the agency quickly found itself mired in political and bureaucratic red tape when it tried to replace the original over-all rule with specific regulations, and the situation grew rapidly out of control as people in the food business saw where the action was and wanted a piece of it. The net effect of the F.D.A.'s abandonment of its rule was to make a reality out of what the rule had treated as an assumption: virtually every type of food has been transformed, by definition, into a drug. But the halcyon days of food claims may soon be over. In July, the F.D.A. proposed a new set of regulations, which would target the more egregious examples of exaggerated labelling and make disease-prevention claims more difficult to justify. The regulations—they have not yet been finalized and would probably not take full effect until early next year—would require that labels give much more specific information about the fat, fibre, and cholesterol content of foods. A doughnut maker or a beer manufacturer will presumably have to do more than add a few oats to his product in order to advertise it as beneficial to health.

The lowered-cholesterol egg is itself the subject of some controversy: To many observers it is not at all clear that producing an egg satisfactorily low in

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cholesterol is possible—that the egg's essential nature can be redefined. Others feel that it is possible, but not the way Albright is doing it. Research into the formerly immutable egg has been going on for years, and several contenders now claim to have found the true route. But there are larger questions that loom over these efforts. For instance, does it really matter whether a refashioned egg can be produced—will people bother to buy a new product that is only slightly healthier than the old? And, too, there is the overarching question of whether dietary cholesterol is the danger it has been made out to be—a dispute that has recently gathered a good deal of force.

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Come, breathe close with me
so I may discover the sweetness
of many imperfections, some missing
tooth, some extra wrinkle, and your body
worn out slightly by carelessness.

—Patrizia Cavalli

(*Translated, from the Italian, by Judith Baumel.*)

• •

WHEN Albright first started tinkering with the egg, it was at the nadir of a long decline, but behind it was a history richer than that of almost any other foodstuff. People have been eating eggs since prehistoric times. To primitive man, eggs were a rare delicacy, stolen out of the nests of wild birds. No one is exactly sure when fowl were first domesticated and eggs produced on a regular basis; Indian records indicate that this was going on around 3200 B.C., and Egyptian and Chinese records set the time at about 1400 B.C. It is believed that Columbus introduced the first chickens to the New World, from Asian stock, and that the chickens and eggs we consume today are descendants of those imports.

Not surprisingly, given its identity as a basic reproductive unit and thus a manifestation of potential life, the egg early acquired symbolic value. Several ancient civilizations—including the Egyptian, the Indian, and the Japanese—envisioned the world as hatched from an egg made by a Creator. Phoenicians explained heaven and earth as two halves of a huge egg, split open. Eggs also gained a reputation as an aphrodisiac and as an assurance of fertility: Central European peasants broke them over their plows to insure abundant crops, and a French custom dictates breaking an egg on the doorstep of a newlywed couple's first home to promote a large family.

In recent history, though, it is the egg's identity as a food source that has been its glory—and, lately, its nemesis. According to figures kept by the American Egg Board, an organization that does promotion, advertising, and research for the industry, the egg reached its prime in the nineteen-forties, when annual per-capita consumption in the United States stood at four hundred and two—more than one egg a day. That was the heyday of the roadside diner, empire of the sunny-side up and over easy; of full family breakfasts cooked by a stay-at-home mother; of dishes like devilled eggs and Scotch eggs and eggs Cockaigne. The egg was considered a kind of miracle ingredient. A *House & Garden* cookbook from the fifties begins a chapter on eggs and cheese like this: "The ubiquitous egg is a cook's best friend. There is the egg that binds, the egg that enriches, the egg that gives substance to a sauce and the egg that gives a soufflé its splendor. . . . *Chefs de cuisine* of eminence have long considered the egg a worthy companion to the most sophisticated foods, fit to crown with a Madeira sauce, to be poached in Burgundy, to recline on a purée of chestnuts or to be covered with foie gras."

But as early as 1950 the annual per-capita consumption began to drop—from three hundred and seventy-seven in 1950 to three hundred and sixty in 1955, and on to three hundred and twenty-four in 1960. Poultry scientists have posited several reasons for the decline: an increase in average income, with an accompanying turn to more expensive and higher-status protein sources, like meat, poultry, and convenience foods; a move toward a lighter, simpler breakfast of coffee and toast, with less emphasis on the family's sitting down together; and concern about possible unhealthful effects of eggs, specifically on the heart. Even though consumption was on the way down, the egg's reputation remained relatively untarnished through the fifties. In a 1958 survey of "homemakers" sponsored by the Poultry and Egg National Board, the precursor of the American Egg Board, ninety-five per cent considered eggs a necessary food, eighty-nine per cent knew that eggs were high in protein, and eighty-eight per cent considered them beneficial. Only seven per cent thought that eggs were harmful to the heart; fifty-five per cent said that eggs had no harmful effect on the heart; and the remaining thirty-eight per cent had no opinion on the subject.

The decline continued, however, and by the nineteen-eighties the three-hundred barrier had been broken. In 1982, despite ever more efficient methods of hen cultivation, the United States was surpassed in egg production for the first time—by the Soviet Union. By then, the reason for the egg's fall was clear: it was a prime source of cholesterol, the latest nutritional villain. The average amount of cholesterol in a large egg was two hundred and seventy-four milligrams, as calculated by the United States Department of Agriculture—almost as much as the American Heart Association was recommending for an entire day's intake (three hundred milligrams). Health officials urged that no one's diet include more than three eggs per week, and that everyone think twice about eating any eggs at all. After all, no one really *needed* eggs; their protein value was easily replaced by less dangerous foods. As evidence mounted that cholesterol intake might be directly related to the amount of plaque buildup in the arteries—and thus directly related to a greater chance of heart attack—the egg's reputation reached new lows. "Egg" had become almost shorthand for "cholesterol."

Egg producers and trade groups panicked. In 1977, when the per-capita consumption had fallen to two hundred and sixty-seven, the American Egg Board started a media campaign, pushing "the incredible, edible egg." Finally, reluctantly, in the mid-eighties the Board and its Egg Nutrition Center jumped on the cholesterol bandwagon, promoting "fat-busting recipe changes" and "a heart healthy diet that is lower in fat, saturated fat and cholesterol" (without, of course, eliminating eggs). The Egg Nutrition Center sponsored conferences on "heart health" and assiduously sent out "backgrounders" and press releases detailing the misconceptions about cholesterol. But it was not until John Albright began marketing his lowered-cholesterol eggs that the Center took what might have been considered as natural first step in the cholesterol wars: it co-sponsored a scientific study to determine the actual, current cholesterol level of eggs. The results were better than the Egg Board could have hoped—and considerably less than perfect from the viewpoint of John Albright.

The study was begun in the summer of 1988 and carried out jointly by the Egg Nutrition Center and the U.S.D.A. To adjust for any regional or seasonal variation, eggs were gathered from more than a hundred major egg producers around the country, and the study was divided into a summer and a winter phase. Each of the egg producers sent three dozen eggs to a laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin; from each sample, six eggs were chosen at random, cracked, and separated, and the yolks—the part that contains all an egg's cholesterol—were combined into huge composites. (The reason the U.S.D.A. gives for creating composites instead of testing individual eggs is economic: each cholesterol analysis costs a hundred dollars, so if individual eggs had been used the cost of the tests alone would have been prohibitive.)

The egg-yolk composites were then subjected to a variety of chemicals to isolate the cholesterol from the proteins and other elements of the yolk. Here the study diverged significantly from earlier U.S.D.A. research into egg cholesterol. "The instrument that's used now for measuring cholesterol is called a gas-liquid chromatograph," explains Gary Beecher, the research leader of the Nutrient Composition Laboratory of the U.S.D.A. and a designer of the study. "What this instrument does is separate components in a sample based upon their boiling points and their ability to form a vapor, or go into a gas phase. In earlier studies, the device used was a colorimeter, in which the cholesterol—and, unfortunately, some of the other components as well—

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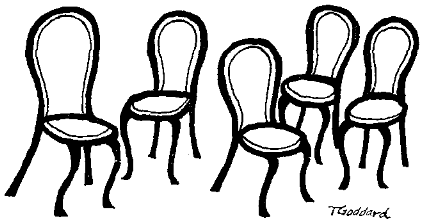
reacted with a chemical to form a color complex, which was then measured with the colorimeter. The problem was that in eggs there are compounds that are very similar in structure to cholesterol but are not cholesterol and do not have the same nutrient properties as cholesterol, and when the older methods were used there were false high readings for cholesterol as a result of these other compounds' being part of the color complex that was measured. Now that we have newer methods, we're able to get at the cholesterol specifically."

The study, which was released in the spring of 1989, came up with an average cholesterol level of two hundred and thirteen milligrams per large egg—a drop of sixty-one milligrams from the old level. A little flurry of news stories followed the announcement of the revised figure, and the Heart Association declared that people could consider eating four eggs per week rather than three. Now the Egg Board had something to work with—a friendlier egg, a less threatening egg, an egg about which it could be said, perhaps a bit disingenuously, "Eggs are lower in cholesterol than ever before!"

FOR John Albright, the issue was more complicated. The cholesterol in his eggs, which had been on the market for two years, measured a hundred and ninety-five milligrams—a marked improvement over two hundred and seventy-four milligrams. But how could he continue to label them "lowered-cholesterol" now that they were in the same ballpark as the new two-hundred-and-thirteen-milligram egg? His only choice was to bring his own numbers down. Along the way, though, he has had plenty to say about the U.S.D.A. cholesterol study.

"If you were to ask the U.S.D.A., very diplomatically, how much it cost to have these tests done and who set the protocol for the tests on this new standard for cholesterol, you know what they'd tell you if they told the truth?" he asks. "That the Egg Nutrition Center or the American Egg Board helped pay for the test and oversaw the protocol for it. The U.S.D.A. announces the number, but the egg people are behind the protocol, pay for the studies, and do it the way they want it done so they can achieve the exact, precise results they're looking to achieve. My personal belief is—and I think we have enough evidence to absolutely substantiate this—that the real level of cholesterol in the large egg is probably closer to two hundred and twenty-five or two hundred and thirty milligrams than to two hundred and thirteen. We have pulled eggs off the shelf and done the testing. The fact is, birds at different age levels have eggs of different cholesterol levels. Birds in different seasons of the year, birds in different regions of the country, lay eggs of different cholesterol levels. If you want to publish a cholesterol guide, make it a guide as per regions of the country. Don't take the low and then average it in with the high and come up with a number that is artificially low. I'm telling you that anybody who is a thinking person, I don't care who you are, cannot conceive that a level will go from two hundred and seventy-four down to two hundred and thirteen in one fell swoop. Anybody who knows anything about the processes of nature knows that that is not in the cards."

In early 1989, the F.D.A. ruled that for an egg to be called "lowered-cholesterol" its cholesterol had to be twenty-five per cent below the average. The new U.S.D.A. number thus meant that Albright's eggs had to clock in at a hundred and sixty milligrams, substantially lower than his first generation of eggs. He claims that he has now met the twenty-five-per-cent requirement. "We have our eggs tested every ten days at an independent lab in Lancaster—a lab, incidentally, that's used by the F.D.A. and the U.S.D.A. for testing products—and we have results back in the office that are showing a hundred and sixty-five, a hundred and sixty-two, a hundred and fifty-nine, a hundred and fifty-seven, a hundred and fifty-four," he says. "And, incidentally, the industry said it is totally impossible for you to achieve a cholesterol level in an egg under about a hundred and ninety milligrams. Can't be done. No way." He chuckles. "So we've been evolving to a lower number continuously, as we fine-tune and improve our system. But I can tell you very candidly that we are not going below a hundred and fifty. We could do an egg below a hundred and fifty today if I used drugs and some other things. But nobody is ever going to point to me and say, 'You used drugs and hormones and this and that and the other thing to shift the operation of the bird, so that you threw it out of its natural balance of production.' "



Albright's scruples about using drugs are not shared by others who are seeking to market a lowered-cholesterol egg. The U.S.D.A. study, by making the standard more stringent, has done much to thin the ranks, but there are still several experimenters who claim they are close to producing an egg even better than Albright's. His first competitors were the least scientific: they were other egg farmers, most of them in Pennsylvania. (The egg business there amounts to a hundred and eighty-five million dollars per year, which makes it one of the biggest egg-producing states.) Inspired by Albright's example, they, too, began testing their eggs, and found that the cholesterol levels were far below the U.S.D.A. average of two hundred and seventy-four milligrams. Before the new U.S.D.A. average came out, fifteen companies were marketing lowered-cholesterol eggs in Pennsylvania, many without having changed their egg-farming practices at all. Now only two companies are left: Albright's and one in Fredericksburg called Dutch Country Egg Farms, which is owned by John Snader.

Snader's lowered-cholesterol operation is much less extensive than Albright's; only five per cent of the eggs he produces are labelled "lowered-cholesterol." And he is a little skeptical of Albright's claims. "I can't believe some of the things he's doing would pass the test that we subject our eggs to," he says. "He's got to know something that I don't. That's all I'm going to say." Snader's own methods are something he prefers to keep under wraps, for fear, he says, of theft by the competition. "We do it by flock selection, by special feed, and about half a dozen different things that I don't want Albright reading about in a magazine," he says. Snader's lowered-cholesterol eggs are selling, even at a premium price, but he is not eager to see the demand increase dramatically. "If it grows too much, with the current

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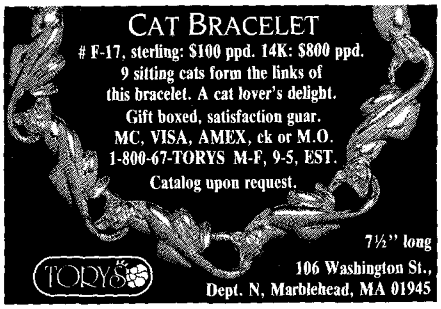

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technology I won't be able to fill the orders," he says. "I'm still doing a lot of experimenting with feeds to see if I can change that, but feed is only a very small part of it—just like nutrition in humans accounts for a very small part of their cholesterol levels."

Bob Fuhrman, the president of C.R. Eggs, in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, would argue with that last assessment. His system, still in the experimental stage, involves feeding hens an iodine-enriched feed, which he claims will make their eggs more healthful not by lowering the cholesterol content but by making the eggs speed up the metabolism of cholesterol in the people who eat them. In other words, these eggs would supposedly lower human cholesterol levels. The feed supplement was created by a Japanese firm and has so far been extensively tested only in Japan, where the criteria for making food health claims are different—and, some say, less stringent. Fuhrman's system is based on a finding that ingested iodine appears to prompt the human metabolism to process cholesterol more efficiently. Detractors say that the amount of iodine contained in the eggs would be too small to have any effect at all on human metabolism, but the search for a magic ingredient has led other researchers to come up with different feed supplements. A nutritional biochemist in Salt Lake City has experimented with introducing fish oil into chicken feed. He reduced egg cholesterol levels between fifteen and twenty per cent—not quite enough to qualify eggs for marketing as "lowered-cholesterol"—but he had to deal with an unpleasant side effect: the eggs tasted and smelled fishy. (Last year, he found a way to get rid of this problem.)

One of the most recent experiments does what Albright claims he will never do: it introduces a drug into the hens' feed. Researchers at Purdue University fed chickens lovastatin, which is usually prescribed to human beings to help reduce cholesterol, and found that their eggs had from thirteen to fifteen per cent less cholesterol than the average. Other drugs have sometimes caused hens to stop laying eggs entirely, but lovastatin did not appear to harm the hens at Purdue or affect their laying cycle, and also did not show up in the eggs themselves. The problem with this system (for egg producers without Albright's qualms) is monetary: the drug is far too expensive to be used widely. The Purdue researchers are looking for another, less costly drug to do the trick.

These are only the latest moves in a search that has actually gone on for decades. Scientists were toying with the notion of lowered-cholesterol eggs long before Albright brought his to market, but no system was found that seemed to merit commercial development. According to Dr. Edward C. Naber, an Ohio State University professor emeritus of poultry science and nutrition, who has traced various attempts to make eggs more healthful, a pioneering experiment in 1934 showed that the fat composition of eggs could be altered by changing the amount of fats in the hens' feed, but it wasn't until the fifties that cholesterol began to be specifically targeted. In 1964 and 1967, studies carried out by Naber and others showed that hens on a low-fat diet produced eggs lower in cholesterol than eggs from hens on a diet of thirty per cent vegetable oil. Studies in the seventies tested the effect of dietary plant sterols on egg cholesterol, and one of them found that adding soybean sterols to hens' diet as two per cent of the feed mixture reduced the cholesterol of their eggs by about fifteen per cent. Another natural ingredient, crude fibre, was tested in 1987, and was found to reduce egg cholesterol by up to eleven per cent. Vitamin A, niacin, and several drugs and chemicals that reduce blood-cholesterol levels in human beings have also been tried, with either no appreciable effects or only small improvements, ranging from two to thirteen per cent. Some researchers turned to genetic selection, hoping to breed a line of chickens that would produce lowered-cholesterol eggs, but so far the cholesterol reductions have been negligible.

In a recent article in a magazine called *Feedstuffs*, Dr. Naber concludes that these experiments show the search for a lowered-cholesterol egg to be a failure: "In view of the relatively small reductions in egg cholesterol concentration attained by any of the methods reviewed, it can be argued that such reductions in egg cholesterol will not contribute significantly to a reduction in total diet cholesterol for those persons that might find it advisable to regulate dietary intake of this substance."

Given such a daunting history of unsuccessful trials, it is not surprising that it is someone like Albright—who proudly describes himself as having "no agricultural background and no scientific background"—who claims to have created an egg significantly lower in cholesterol. Many scientists and government officials remain unconvinced, and in the face of all those failed experiments the question they pose is a natural one: Is there really such a thing as a lowered-cholesterol egg?

THE answer is not as straightforward as it might seem. The reality of the lowered-cholesterol egg is still very much a matter of conjecture—even in the face of laboratory tests and other seemingly concrete data. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's poultry-and-egg-inspection office periodically does its own independent testing and has confirmed the claims made by Albright and John Snader for their eggs. And, of course, Albright and Snader point to their own lab results as proof. But tests are clearly not going to yield the definitive answer on lowered-cholesterol eggs. For instance, while Albright faults the U.S.D.A. test for being inaccurate because the average-cholesterol number is too low (forcing him to lower his own results in order to sell his product), Snader faults it for being too high (after all, most of his eggs sell with no cholesterol claims at all, so he stands to benefit from a public perception that eggs in general are more healthful). "I'd say the new number is closer to the truth than two hundred and seventy-four was," Snader says. "But it's conservative. I would guess that if I took all my eggs and averaged them, we'd be somewhere just over two hundred, maybe two hundred and five."

John E. Vanderveen, the director of the division of nutrition of the F.D.A.'s Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, feels that the cholesterol level of the average egg is "down someplace between two hundred and two hundred and ten—maybe a little less than two hundred, but in that range." And since he has seen no egg significantly lower than that, he says, he is convinced that there is no such thing as a lowered-cholesterol

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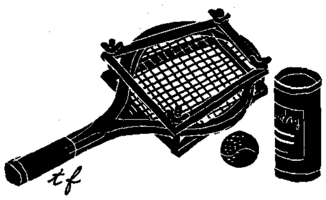
egg. "We have analyzed eggs labelled 'lowered-cholesterol' and found that all eggs are about the same," he says. "In fact, some of those that were labelled 'low' were actually somewhat higher than some that were not labelled 'low.' Clearly, from a nutritional point of view it's inappropriate to call eggs 'lowered-cholesterol' at this point in time if all eggs are about the same." (If that's the case, why hasn't the F.D.A. pulled all the so-called lowered-cholesterol eggs off the shelf? The answer is to be found in the labyrinths of bureaucracy: Although the F.D.A. has regulatory authority over certain foods, manufacturers are not required to get preapproval of their food products from the agency. So the F.D.A. often becomes aware of a new product or claim simply by seeing it on the shelves, or by reading about it in the trade press or receiving trade or consumer complaints. At that point, the agency can decide whether to take any action against a product, but in general it spends as much time and effort on devising standards for the food industry to follow as it does on enforcing those standards. Enforcement of food claims is often left to state agencies, which may have more time or larger budgets for pursuing errant producers. And in fact in early 1989 the New York State Department of Agriculture pulled John Albright's eggs off the shelves and fined him for not meeting the F.D.A.'s standard for lowered cholesterol, an occurrence that still rankles him.)



After spending close to thirty years trying to create a lowered-cholesterol egg, Dr. Naber has found himself in the difficult position of trying to prove a negative: that there cannot be such a thing. It is tempting to assume that the work of a scientist makes for disinterested results, and certainly Naber is dubious about Albright's claims. "I think that if those eggs are lower in cholesterol they're lower by a small amount—probably not enough, in my view, to make any difference," he says.

What about Albright's test results—and those of the Pennsylvania Agriculture Department—showing a twenty-five-per-cent reduction? "I have not seen those tests substantiated," Naber says. "A lot of bad values for the cholesterol content of eggs have appeared in the literature, because the people who were doing the analyses did not use accurate methods. As for Albright's system, it is possible that environmental stress may have some effect, but I seriously doubt whether it has an effect of the kind he claims. The principal thing about the husbandry of chickens which affects the amount of cholesterol in the egg is rate of egg production. Chickens that are laying large numbers of eggs deposit less cholesterol per egg than chickens laying fewer eggs. And that, from a production point of view, is the principal thing the producer can do that might limit to some extent the amount of cholesterol in the egg. Anything he can do to maintain a high rate of egg production in his flock will contribute to eggs that have a little less cholesterol in them. Lights, a good healthy environment—all those things aid the bird in maintaining a high level of productivity."

Naber has an uncommonly intimate relationship to the egg; he has devoted the bulk of his career to the study of it—mainly to egg composition and embryonic development. From twenty to twenty-five per cent of his work, by his estimate, has been concerned specifically with looking for a way to reduce egg cholesterol. His first cholesterol experiments, published in 1964, proceeded from a simple and logical premise reminiscent of Albright's first hypothesis: Naber thought that a diet high in polyunsaturated fats, which were then being tested for controlling cholesterol levels in human beings, might also have some effect on chickens and therefore on their eggs. But, unlike the serendipitous results of Albright's first tests, Naber's were a disaster. "Just the opposite of what we anticipated happened," he says. "The eggs were *higher* in cholesterol than normal eggs. And, of course, that put us in a tizzy, and we had to figure out what was going on. It turns out that diets that are very high in fat, whether saturated or unsaturated, accelerate cholesterol synthesis in the body. And in the case of the laying hen this acceleration results in more deposition of cholesterol in the egg."

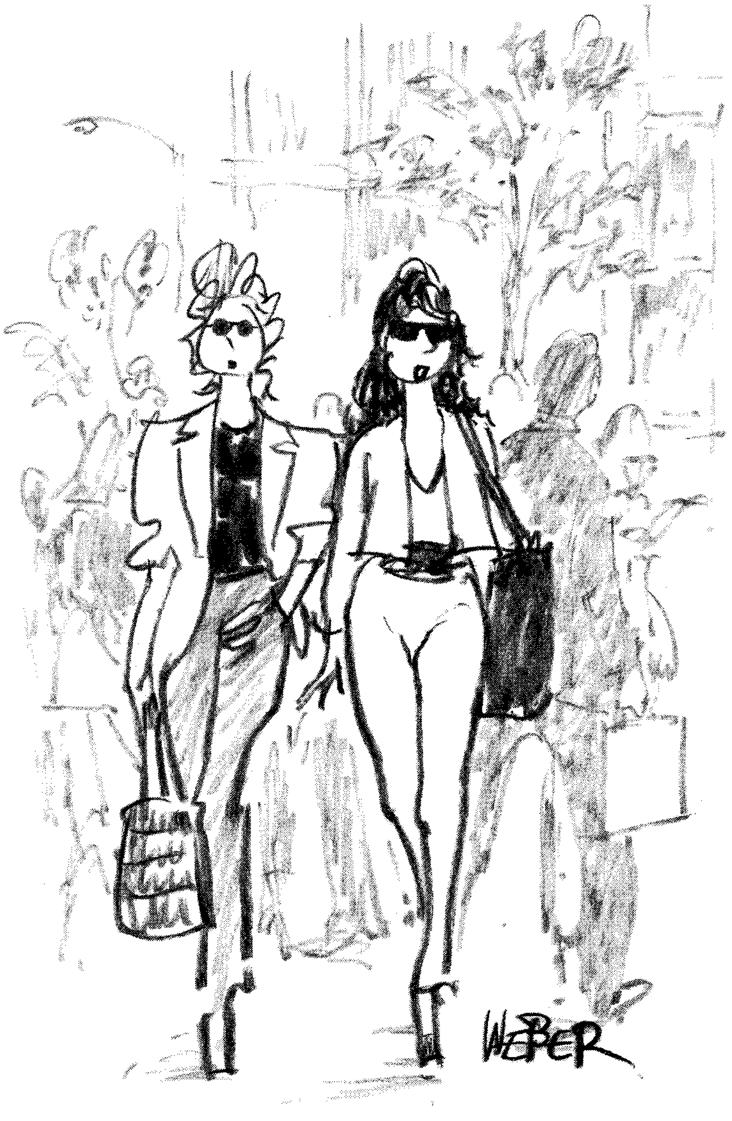
Naber was not put off; there were many other dietary constituents, as well as chemicals and drugs, to be tested. "We've tried so many things that it would take hours to describe all of them," he says. In spite of his declaration in *Feedstuffs*, his work is continuing; his most recent experiments were completed just a few months ago. "We were testing some steroidal saponins and their effect on egg cholesterol," he says. "Saponins are naturally occurring materials in certain plants, such as alfalfa and certain types of cactus plant belonging to the yucca family. These materials are known to interfere with the absorption and utilization of cholesterol in the gut. We experimented with these substances in the diet of the laying hen, and, to make a long story short, the study showed that they have no effect on egg cholesterol."

That result is familiar to Naber, and he believes he has found the reason that creating an egg significantly lower in cholesterol is highly unlikely. "We started out thinking we could reduce egg cholesterol by one half," he says. "And with certain drugs it was possible to do that, but such an egg would be unacceptable for a variety of reasons. The biggest problem we found was that drugs that are effective in reducing egg cholesterol also affect reproduction in the laying hen. It turns out that if you shut down cholesterol synthesis in the hen enough to reduce the egg content to about half the normal value, you have also reduced cholesterol production in the hen's body to the point where there's no longer enough to synthesize the female sex hormones and androgenic hormones needed to stimulate the reproductive process in the first place. The sex hormones, the adrenal hormones, Vitamin D, and a number of other substances are made from cholesterol. So the hen's egg cholesterol would go down, down, down, down, and suddenly she'd just stop laying eggs. Obviously, if the hen doesn't lay any eggs the question of whether they contain more or less cholesterol is moot. Over all, we've found that it's routinely possible, and very easy, to reduce the cholesterol content of the egg ten or fifteen per cent, by carefully controlling diet in a number of ways. But I have my doubts whether such an egg, as a food item, has any notable role in the human diet."

Naber's resistance to the possibility of a lowered-cholesterol egg goes beyond his conviction that such a goal is, at best, very difficult to achieve. His reservations are wider-ranging—and more potentially daunting to John Albright and those who would follow Albright's example. Naber questions whether even if a true lowered-cholesterol egg could be created anyone should bother to eat it.

"I've come to the conclusion that it probably just isn't worth creating a lowered-cholesterol egg," he says. "It has been a gradual decision, based partly on the fact that there aren't any really good ways of reducing egg cholesterol by a large amount, and partly on the evidence from the human-medicine side about dietary cholesterol, which is seen as having less and less importance. The more we hear about human dietary studies, the more we realize that the cholesterol content of someone's diet probably runs a weak third in terms of dietary modifications that can lower blood levels of cholesterol—with total energy intake and saturated-fat intake running number one and number two. That's because most of the cholesterol found in the human body is made there to begin with, and doesn't come from the diet. And, in normal human beings, when you eat less cholesterol the response of your body is to make more. And vice versa. There are diseased people, and people who are not in normal health, who make too much cholesterol themselves and who probably can be aided by a reduction in dietary cholesterol, but I think this is a small proportion of the population."

Even Albright and Snader, who are profiting from the sale of lowered-cholesterol eggs, don't deny that there is a great deal of confusion about the true role of cholesterol in the human diet. "I've borrowed this phrase from Paul Harvey—who has, on occasion, some very, very marvellous phrases: 'You can't unring a bell,' " Albright says. "And for ten years they've hammered into people 'cholesterol, cholesterol,' and it'll take about five to seven years of education to unring that bell and convert people to believing that there are different kinds of cholesterol and that cholesterol is not all bad—that certain kinds of cholesterol are necessary in your diet—and that there are many other things that are significantly more important to your over-all health than cholesterol." Snader conveys the same point anecdotally: "I eat as



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many as twenty-one eggs a week, and I have a cholesterol count of a hundred and eighty-four to a hundred and ninety. My wife, who eats no eggs, is up close to three hundred without medication. That's true of a lot of people, and it's not a fluke thing. Cholesterol is regulated by your body, not by what you eat."

Much has been learned about cholesterol in the last few decades—and especially in the last few years, as scrutiny of diet has intensified—but almost all researchers acknowledge that there is much more to know. Cholesterol, technically classified as a steroid, is a fatty substance that not only occurs naturally throughout the body but is necessary for many bodily functions, including the formation of bile acids and steroid hormones. It is obtained by the body both from outside sources—animal-derived foods like eggs, whole milk, cheese, and meat—and from internal sources. What is unhealthy is excess cholesterol, because it sticks to the walls of arteries and can form plaque, which in turn can cause blood clots to form. The blood clots may eventually form a blockage in the heart, or the plaque deposits may grow so large that they completely block a vessel. Either of these events can lead to a heart attack. Moreover, blood-cholesterol levels are now known to be made up of two main parts—low-density lipoproteins, or LDLs, and high-density lipoproteins, or HDLs—and these substances represent "bad cholesterol" and "good cholesterol." HDLs are believed to help clear cholesterol from the bloodstream, while LDLs are busily building the deposits. Heart-disease specialists advise that not only should one's over-all cholesterol level be low (under two hundred) but within that number LDLs should be less than a hundred and thirty and HDLs should be more than thirty-five. As a result of the LDL-HDL findings, doctors and nutritionists have stopped urging patients to consume polyunsaturated oils like safflower, sunflower, and soybean, which appear to reduce the blood levels of HDLs along with those of LDLs. The latest oils of choice are monounsaturateds, like olive, peanut, canola, and avocado, which are believed to reduce only LDL cholesterol.

Cholesterol has another double identity—one that is even more confusing. The word "cholesterol" refers both to the substance contained in foods, known as dietary cholesterol, and to the substance circulating in the blood, known as serum cholesterol. And the confusion of these two terms has enabled many marketers to perpetrate what amounts to a fraud on consumers. A food that contains no dietary cholesterol at all—for instance, cookies made with a tropical oil like coconut oil—can raise the serum-cholesterol level of the person eating it. In the case of coconut oil, the dangerous element is saturated fat, which itself contains no cholesterol. To say that such a product is "cholesterol-free" is perfectly truthful but ultimately misleading.

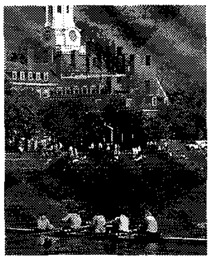
Misunderstandings about the nature of cholesterol are only one part of the problem. Although some studies have seemed to show that blood-cholesterol levels can be lowered by eliminating cholesterol from the diet, and that such reductions may lead to a healthier heart, other researchers argue that no such direct effect has been shown, and that blood-cholesterol levels may actually be affected more by an individual's heredity or metabolism than by what he or she eats. And, say the dissenters, studies, even large clinical ones, can be interpreted in various ways. For instance, the fact that two phenomena are found to be associated does not always mean that one has caused the other. Just because high blood cholesterol has been statistically associated with death from heart disease does not automatically mean that lowering blood cholesterol will lower the risk of heart disease.

Edward Naber is one of the scientists who are convinced that the nation's concern about dietary cholesterol is exaggerated. "In the last few years, what we've seen is the development of an extensive cholesterol phobia, but I think it's past the wide part of the cycle," he says. "I spent considerable amounts of time last fall down at the National Institutes of Health, talking to various people there. And most of them willingly admitted that dietary cholesterol isn't very important. I'd say to them, 'But that's not what your literature says.' Now I think they're going to start backing off to some extent. The pendulum is swinging back the other way."

"AMERICANS still believe in eggs, just the way they still believe in regular whole milk," says Tom Pirko, the president of a Los Angeles marketing consulting firm called Bevmark. Last year, Pirko's firm was asked by a client to conduct a survey of consumers' views on lowered-cholesterol eggs, and found that there was probably not a mass market for them. "Reëngineering a piece of Mother Nature like this doesn't sell," he says. "We don't see any indication that people believe the egg has been reinvented. The whole egg thing is a state of mind, and people still basically believe in it, and in beef, too. You don't just throw away things that have been part of the American diet—the American life style—that easily." In a 1989 poll by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for a *Wall Street Journal* centennial survey of "The American Way of Buying," more than half the Americans interviewed said that they had reduced their consumption of high-fat, high-cholesterol, high-sodium foods such as fried foods, eggs, and red meat, but more than half also said that they continued to eat ice cream. And many consumers said that they would go back to the eggs and meat they had given up if fat and cholesterol weren't an issue.

John Albright knows that American tastes can change, sometimes whimsically. Cholesterol may be the game of the moment, but the danger of courting sophisticated consumers, as Albright does, is that they can shift direction at the drop of a new study or two. "You can't hang your hat on one peg—namely, the cholesterol issue—because it isn't going to work, it isn't going to hold water," he says. We are sitting in a restaurant in Lancaster—the kind of restaurant that fills with families at lunchtime, where the menu features bacon-laced club sandwiches, hamburgers, French fries, and eggs. The Formica-topped tables reflect back the high voices of toddlers and the heavy clink of Buffalo china, and beyond the large, unadorned windows stretches a parking lot and the rolling, spring-green fields of the Pennsylvania countryside. From where we are sitting, in a booth next to a window, I have a good view not only of the expanse outside but of the crowded interior. Near the front door is a round refrigerated display case, in which wedges of cream pies rotate relentlessly. It appears that no one here is particularly worried about cholesterol levels or about whether the cream-of-tomato soup is full of saturated fats.

"The minute you try to stay at a



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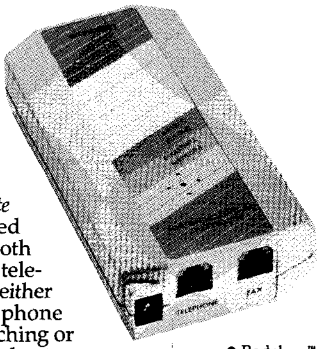

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given point, you're going to miss out, because the world we live in changes so rapidly," Albright says. "If you think you've got a product that's a winner, and you hang your hat on that product, one day you're going to wake up and find out that you're out to lunch—you're gone! So you've got to continue to look for expansion of market share with new products that give you a broader base."

It may soon become imperative for Albright to do just that—at least, if his egg business is to survive. The F.D.A.'s new proposals for regulating cholesterol claims on food labels threaten the very existence of the putative lowered-cholesterol egg. The new rules, if they are approved and go into effect, will require that a product labelled "reduced cholesterol" (and Albright's "lowered-cholesterol" tag would almost certainly be interpreted as such) be seventy-five per cent lower in cholesterol than the average product of that kind. An egg with fifty-three milligrams of cholesterol is, everyone concedes, truly an impossibility.

Albright is preparing to enter what he sees as the newest growth market in the American food business, and, as before, he is betting that consumers will pay more for items presented as being particularly healthful. "We're bringing out an organic egg," he says. "The feed that we give those birds is certified organic—no herbicides or pesticides or chemical fertilizers were used to grow it. And we haven't been using any antibiotics in the birds all along. We're also in the middle of our second batch of organic chickens—chickens that are fed certified organic feeds. Eventually, we want to expand into a full line of organic, chemical-free foods, so that people will have a chance in the marketplace to buy a quality food if they so desire—if they're willing to pay the extra money, and if they're convinced that it is truly a premium product."

But even the optimistic Albright admits that such expansion presents a marketing challenge. "We're going to have to change our way of thinking," he says. "To our way of thinking, if a piece of fruit *looks* perfect it's marvellous. You take an organically grown orange, it looks sick as a dog. But you bite into it, you think you've died and gone to heaven—it's so sweet it's astounding! I have a sister-in-law in Florida who has an orange tree and a grapefruit tree in her back yard, and she never sprays them or prunes them, or anything—just lets them grow. You get grapefruits off her tree, they look almost black. You cut those things, one grapefruit provides you with an eight-ounce glass of grapefruit juice so good you will not want to stop drinking it. But the only way you're going to make people realize that is to have them sample it in the stores. You know—'Try it, you'll like it.' "

Albright goes on to describe his planned expansion into the South, the West, and Chicago, and his future stock of organic beef, pork, vegetables, fruits. "Our goal is not to be the biggest, just to be the best," he says. "Because when you aspire to bigness you've got to give something up in terms of quality. And I don't want to do that. When people buy our chicken, I want them to know they're buying the best organic chicken on the market. When they buy our eggs, same thing." He sees no contradiction between organic foods—the embodiment of small-scale, old-fashioned values—and the universe of overhyped, technologically altered foods which he entered with his lowered-cholesterol eggs. Like the consumers he courts, Albright wants it all, and he has created a philosophy that expands to fit the changing demands of his customers. That much is clear from his basic attitude toward the egg: despite all his efforts to alter it, the egg, to Albright, is no villain. "I'll tell you one thing," he says. "I know how people are going to feel about eggs if we ever get into rough times in this country—into a position where we're in a non-growth economy. Because eggs are the highest, cheapest source of protein known to man. Nutritionally, the egg is so good, so superior, that if you're suddenly faced with reducing your budget—if you're looking for nutrition versus dollars invested—the egg is going to go to the head of the class." He takes a bite of his hamburger, as the chocolate cream pie comes rotating back into view. —MICHELLE STACEY

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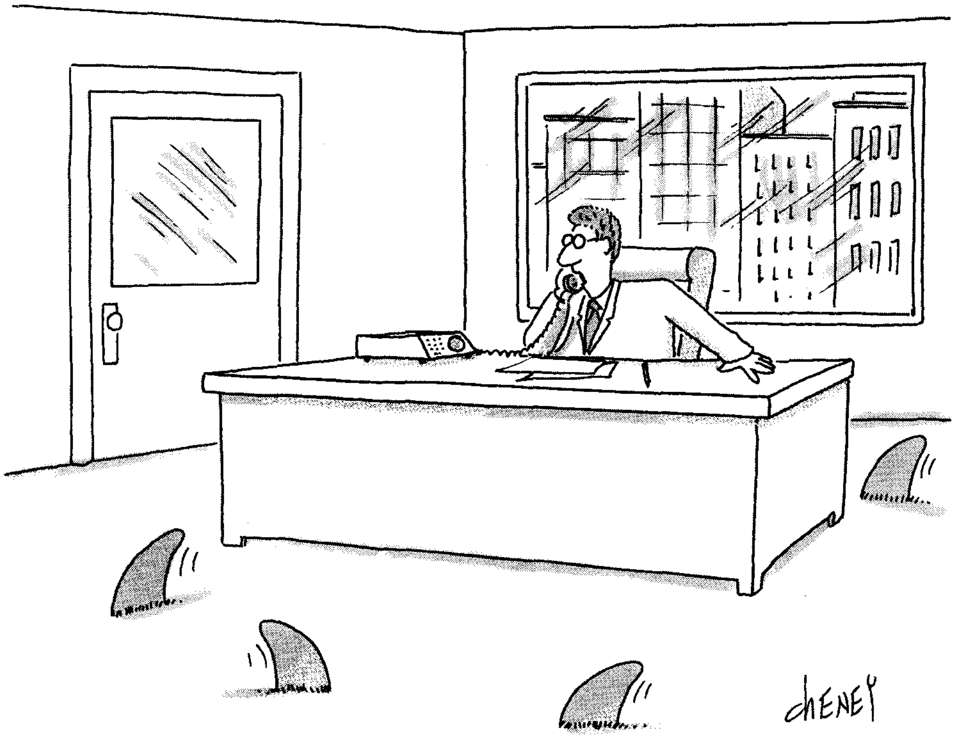
VIRTUOSOS do not fit easily into jazz. The music revolves around improvisation, and jazz improvisers need only enough technique to play what they hear in their heads. (The drummer Sidney Catlett never considered himself a virtuoso, but he got off certain dazzling snare and cymbal patterns no other drummer could match—not even Buddy Rich. Catlett's technique was an extension of his imagination; impossible figures popped into his head and instantaneously became real.) Too much technique saps improvisation: it causes floridity and grandstanding, and it tricks audiences into believing that bombast is music. Jazz has harbored two undeniable virtuosos, but no one has ever known quite what to do with them. They are Sarah Vaughan, who died last spring at the age of sixty-six, and Art Tatum (1909-56), whose final recordings have been issued—with an hour of previously unreleased material—on six compact disks called "Art Tatum: The Complete Pablo Group Masterpieces."

Sarah Vaughan was born in Newark and joined Earl Hines' big band as a singer and second pianist when she was nineteen. She never had any formal training—she was a bebop baby. Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie were in Hines' band, and so was the singer Billy Eckstine. Vaughan made her first recordings with Eckstine when he formed his own big band in 1944, and a year later she made a small-band record with Parker and Gillespie. By the end of the fifties, she had become a famous singer who moved easily between jazz and popular song. By the end of the sixties, she was a singer of operatic dimensions. She grew to diva proportions, and so did her voice. She had four octaves, each clear and spacious. She sang falsetto, and she could sound like a baritone. She could drop from soprano to baritone in the space of one word. Her low tones were cavernous and her high notes were silver peaks. She had several different vibratos, and when it pleased her she could sing without any vibrato at all. (Think of the Kate Smith singers of the thirties: their vibratos led them.)

In 1980, the composer, conductor, and critic Gunther Schuller introduced Vaughan at a recital she gave at the Smithsonian, and he said that she was "the greatest vocal artist of our century," a hosanna that he immediately complicated by adding that she was "the most *creative* vocal artist of our time." This was true. She was a wonderful embellisher and improviser, who never sang a song the same way twice. She remade her materials—generally, the songs of Rodgers and Hart, the Gershwins, Kern, Porter, and Arlen—in her own image. The cost to the songs was sometimes high. She altered melodic lines and harmonies, mislaid lyrics, and used so much melisma that the words became unintelligible. At her most unfettered, she became a horn singer. Yet her melodic lines were of such complexity and daring that no horn player could have played them. Ultimately, she became a kind of abstract singer, whose materials were inadequate for what she did but were all she had. She could, of course, also sing a song relatively straight. But the richness of her voice was always there, and, no matter how few melodic and harmonic alterations she made, this richness tended to overshadow the song, to lean over it, like a voluptuous woman reading a book.

VAUGHAN and Art Tatum revelled in their techniques. Vaughan liked to show off her intervals, her perfect pitch, her vibratos, and her range. Tatum liked to show off his touch (the envy of every pianist of the past fifty years), his startling speed, his two-handed runs, and his left hand, which could match his right. As Vaughan and Tatum grew older, they inevitably leaned more and more on their technical tricks. (Aging improvisers tend to unwittingly plagiarize their own old solos.) Vaughan shuttled between her registers, held notes so long they took on a life of their own, and pretended she was Joan Sutherland or Paul Robeson. Tatum released harmonic clouds, making his chords sound as if they had fifteen or twenty notes, and connected them with long runs—coils of sound that trapped the listener and freed Tatum of the burden of fresh improvisations. He gave the impression at such times that he was speeding luxuriously through the song; in reality, he was pedalling easily in place. Both Vaughan and Tatum were worshipped by their audiences and by their fellow-musicians—for their bravura effects and for their musicianship—and they wore their mantles with a pleased arrogance.

Tatum's career didn't last much



"Can I call you back, Ted?"

more than twenty years. (Vaughan's lasted forty-five years, an impressive length of time for any singer, and more impressive still when one realizes that her great voice was even more resilient and powerful at the end of her career than at the beginning.) Tatum was recorded only fitfully until the early fifties, when the jazz impresario Norman Granz had him set down about two hundred numbers, more than a hundred of them solo efforts and the rest with various instrumentalists. (Would that Granz had filmed him at the same time; only three or four minutes of Tatum on film exist.) Granz got to Tatum when he was already showing signs of prolixity, but there are sufficient flashes of his old brilliance. This is particularly true of the group numbers, even though Tatum had spent most of his career as a solo pianist and found it difficult to squeeze himself into ensemble situations. He towered over musicians he was supposed to accompany, or else soloed so magnificently that he dwarfed everyone else.

Granz recorded Tatum with seven groups between 1954 and 1956. There were fourteen numbers with Benny Carter (on alto saxophone) and Louis Bellson; eight with Roy Eldridge, the bassist John Simmons, and the drummer Alvin Stoller; twenty-five with Lionel Hampton and Buddy Rich, augmented here and there by the trumpeter Harry Edison, the bassist Red Callender, and the guitarist Barney Kessel; ten with Callender and Jo Jones; eight with Buddy DeFranco, Callender, and the drummer Bill Douglass; and seven with the tenor saxophonist Ben Webster, Callender, and Douglass. Carter and Tatum got along well: Carter floats easily over Tatum's polite waves, and Bellson is steady and swinging. Their best side is a medium-tempo "Blues in B Flat." In it, Tatum's four impassioned choruses amount to a short history of blues piano, and Carter's four come as close to being impassioned as he ever gets.

The Eldridge session doesn't quite work. The trumpeter, using a mute most of the time, buzzes along somewhere near Tatum, and his open horn is not as galvanic as it often was at this period. Tatum becomes irrepressible behind Eldridge's second chorus in "I Surrender Dear," when he looses an avalanche of notes that suggest a bad boy rolling down a hill in a barrel to get attention. Tatum, Hampton, and Rich recorded fifteen of their numbers at one session. Rich is ponderous, and Hampton's vibes sound like nails being poured into a tin can. But Tatum has a good time. He drops some stride piano in behind Hampton on "Hallelujah," he solos behind Hampton's solo in "Body and Soul," and he reproduces Nat Cole's bridge from his trio recording of "What Is This Thing Called Love?" Harry Edison helps things along in the eight numbers he is in, but he is almost thrown in "Verve Blues" when Tatum plays some less than tonal tremolos behind him. The trio numbers with Red Callender and Jo Jones are just that—Tatum accompanied by bass and drums. Jones takes a couple of feathery brush solos, and Tatum swings surprisingly hard in "Isn't It Romantic?" and "I Guess I'll Have to Change My Plans."

The Tatum-DeFranco-Douglass-Callender numbers are a lark. DeFranco, the most fluent of all jazz clarinettists, suits Tatum completely. They play tag, echo each other, parody each other, attempt to escape from each other, and turn each other's figures inside out. DeFranco once said of the session, "I was sick that day, but it wasn't an occasion I would have missed. It was a game between us of 'Can you top this?' He'd play some astonishing figure and laugh, or turn and make a face at me over one shoulder. Or he'd rest his right hand on his knee and play with just his left hand, making it sound like both hands. I think he could have outwitted Charlie Parker."

Tatum's date with Ben Webster was his last studio recording; he died two months after. It is an elegiac session. Webster, who idolized Tatum, plays with an enormous tone, and he doesn't growl, hit any clams, or coast. The two men rise up to meet each other, and in "Night and Day," "My Ideal," and "Where or When" they become one. Felicity Howlett, the Tatum wizard, has pointed out that Webster "considered 'Night and Day' to be his finest recorded performance." Webster had a way of topping himself, but he didn't record anything better for the rest of his life. He is surely sitting on Tatum's right.

—Whitney Balliett

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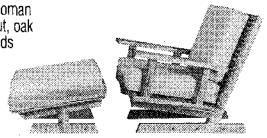

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LETTER FROM TOKYO

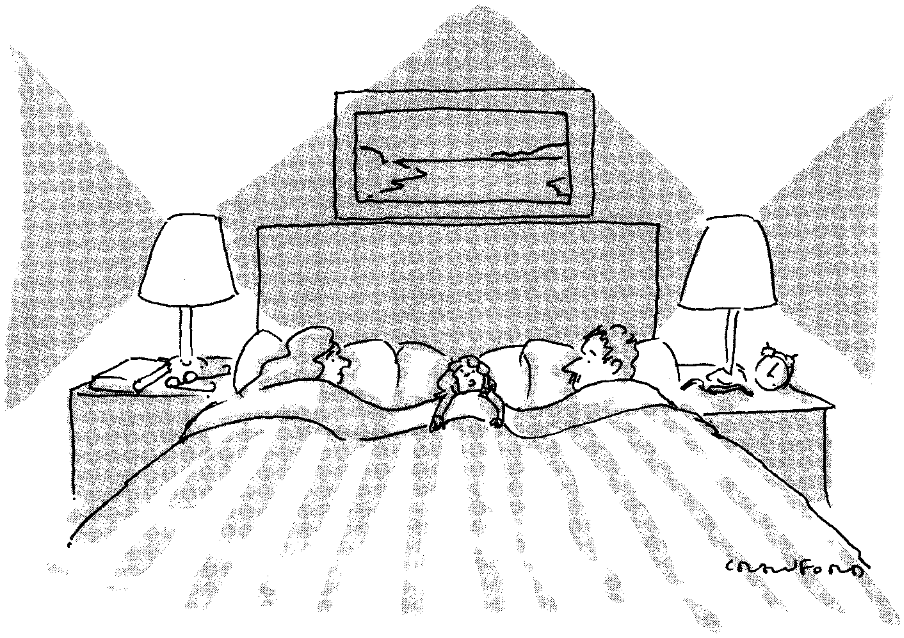
SEPTEMBER 15

WATCHING television news footage of Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu at the July summit meeting in Houston of leaders from the industrial democracies was like watching a child who has been unexpectedly let out of school for a few days. It wasn't hard to imagine that François Mitterrand, France's dour President, might have balked at the thought of a Texas barbecue with the other Group of Seven leaders, but there was no missing Kaifu's genuine glee as he smiled from under his oversized cowboy hat and let loose with modest bursts of "Howdy!" His enthusiasm for summitry, as well as for rodeos and Texas pageantry, was clearly unreserved. Kaifu, who is fifty-nine, had travelled little outside Japan before he became Prime Minister, in August, 1989, and he obviously judged his first summit to be a successful one, chiefly because President Bush and his Secretary of State, James A. Baker 3rd, so purposefully displayed their acceptance of him.

Summit meetings of the Group of Seven are not the passing news events here that they seem to be for most Americans and Europeans. Since 1975, when Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Mitterrand's predecessor, conceived of them, they have become for the Japanese rituals of increasing importance. Elaborate consideration is given to what the Prime Minister will and will not discuss; last-minute changes among the so-called sherpas, and the assistant sherpas, and the advisers to the assistant sherpas, keep lights burning past midnight in the Tokyo ministries. Mid- and post-summit analyses filed by the many hundreds of Japanese reporters who cover the event go into the most minute detail. End-of-summit photographs are scrutinized to see where the Japanese leader is standing—at the edge of the group, looking excluded, or closer to the middle of the lineup, looking involved, perhaps even essential. Because the Japanese are highly conscious of their position among other nations, these things say a great deal to them.

As soon as the summit ended, I visited Tokyo University, which turns out most of Japan's political leaders and many of its prominent professionals and industrialists, to see Takashi Inoguchi, a young professor of international relations. Inoguchi, who is on the faculty of the Institute of Oriental Culture, teaches and writes at the university's main campus, a leafy oasis in a busy neighborhood called Hongo. "I don't think anyone can dispute that Kaifu has just accomplished a great deal for Japan," Inoguchi said as soon as we began talking. He explained that the Prime Minister had persuaded his summit colleagues to accept Tokyo's decision to begin disbursing to China a package of loans, worth about six billion dollars, that had been suspended after the Tiananmen Square democracy movement was suppressed last year, and he had asserted himself effectively alongside President Bush and Britain's Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, in opposing large-scale financial assistance to the Soviet Union. He had also succeeded in getting Secretary of State Baker to support Japan's claim to four Soviet-occupied islands in the Sea of Okhotsk—a major element of a dispute, dating from 1945, that has prevented Tokyo from participating in the profound shifts in East-West relations we have witnessed over the past year. By accomplishing all this, Inoguchi added, Kaifu had given Japan an audible and respected voice in summit proceedings—something it had rarely had in the past. "This was a real departure for a Japanese Prime Minister," he said. "Kaifu was strong, assertive, and very political."

I expected Kaifu to rush home to a hero's welcome. In the days just after the summit, even ordinary Japanese were delighted. Television commentators here, who may now outdo their East European counterparts in the matter of stone-faced delivery, seemed on the brink of smiles. It wasn't only that Kaifu had got things done for Japan; he had carried the summit off with poise, and he had mattered. Kaifu delayed his return from Houston with publicized but not very useful trips to Atlanta and to the mountains of Colorado. Once he had arrived back in Tokyo, on Sunday, July 15th, the national newspapers were full of praise for his summit performance. "Another feather in his cap," the political commentator for the *Yomiuri Shimbun* wrote the next day, and the *Mainichi Shimbun* said, "The Prime Minister left a totally different impression from his predecessors." Kaifu's popularity ratings in polls taken by the *Yomiuri* and other large dailies shot quickly from about fifty per cent to sixty—just short of a postwar record. It was soon apparent, though, why the Prime Minister had been in no hurry to get home. Japan may have been happy to greet him, but Nagatacho, the outwardly sedate neighborhood that is the center of Japanese political life, fell quickly into a state of near-pandemonium, from which it has still not fully recovered. As a friend in Nagatacho put it midway through the mess that fol-



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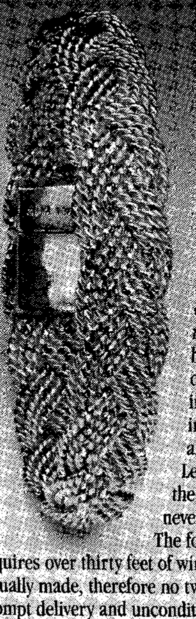

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lowed, what we began to see even before Kaifu stepped off his plane was "a rather gory carving up of the Houston spoils" by young Prime Ministerial hopefuls and their political backers in the governing Liberal Democratic Party.

Although outsiders probably didn't realize it, the unblocking of Japan's loan package to China was a major event here, and received more attention than any of Kaifu's other successes in Houston. Tokyo's acceptance of the post-Tiananmen embargo on official assistance had been a subject of contention among the Japanese for months before the summit. It had stalled the investment plans of many large corporations that were eager to begin operating on the mainland but unwilling to do so until Japan lent enough money to build the roads, rail lines, power plants, and port facilities necessary to make investments work. Relations with China also have a deep cultural significance in Japan, and it had been somewhat jarring to the nation's sense of itself to have those relations intruded upon by the Western powers. To win the approval of Bush and other summit leaders on the China issue, then, was a political prize. Now who would travel to China to discuss the loan, and who would represent Japan at the Asian Games, scheduled to be held in Beijing in September? These were questions well worth fighting over. And in the fight that ensued the Houston hero seemed to be transformed overnight into a dazed bystander struggling just to keep pace with daily events, which went roughly like this:

July 11th: As the Houston summit ends, a senior L.D.P. official in Tokyo announces that Kaifu intends to visit Beijing during the Asian Games.

July 13th: In the United States, Kaifu tells reporters that he will make a careful judgment about a trip to Beijing, and that his schedule may prove an obstacle.

July 17th: Kiichi Miyazawa, one of the L.D.P.'s so-called Old Guard leaders, has a post-Houston meeting with Bush in Washington and announces that *he* has decided to go to China.

July 18th: Hiroshi Mitsuzuka, a former Foreign Minister, has already travelled to China. He announces that Japanese loans will begin to arrive in September. He also tells China's Premier, Li Peng, that Noboru Takeshita, one of Kaifu's predecessors as Prime Minister, will be sent to Beijing as a special envoy, and that Education Minister Kosuke Hori will accompany him.

July 18th: Kaifu, now back in Tokyo, announces to Japanese reporters, "I have no information about any plan to send Takeshita to China."

July 19th: Kaifu tells Sun Pinghua, the chairman of the Japan-China Friendship Association, "I cannot go to China under present circumstances."

July 19th: Chief Cabinet Secretary Misoji Sakamoto declares that Mitsuzuka's statement on July 18th does not reflect a government decision. "It is unthinkable that an incumbent Minister such as Mr. Hori would go to China," he adds.

July 20th: Ichiro Ozawa, the L.D.P.'s Secretary-General, announces during a visit to West Germany, "Mr. Kaifu will go to China for the Asian Games. He can leave the loan issue to someone else."

July 20th: Kaifu says, "I will talk to Mr. Ozawa when he returns." He is equivocal about a visit to China.

July 20th: Mitsuzuka tells Kaifu he did not actually state that Takeshita and Hori would go to China. But he asks Kaifu to consider sending Education Minister Hori anyway.

July 20th: Shin Kanemaru, who used his power as a faction leader within the L.D.P. to install Kaifu in office, announces that *he* will visit China at the end of August, for talks with Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng, and other Chinese leaders.

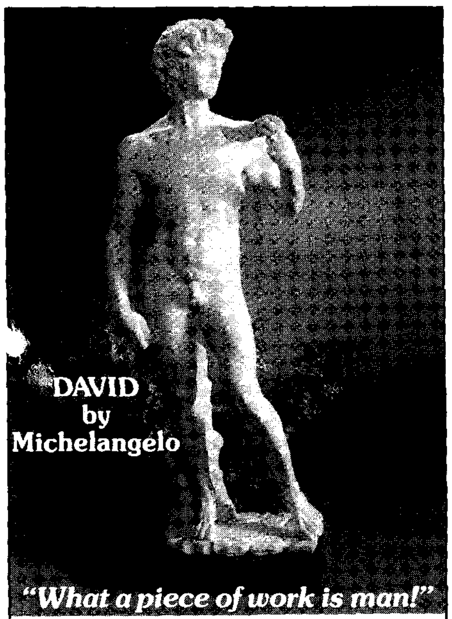
July 23th: Kiichi Miyazawa, on the eve of his trip to China, tells Kaifu it would be appropriate to send Takeshita to China, because Takeshita was Prime Minister when negotiations on the loan began.

July 23th: Secretary-General Ozawa returns from Europe. Kaifu tells reporters that after he speaks with Ozawa he will make an announcement about who visits China.

July 24th: Kaifu announces he has decided to send Takeshita to China as a special envoy.

July 25th: Miyazawa formally informs Beijing that Japan is prepared to begin its loan program.

July 25th: Chief Cabinet Secretary Sakamoto comments, "It's time to rein in the renegade politicians on the Chi-



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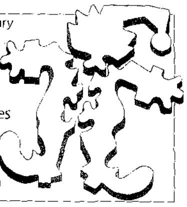

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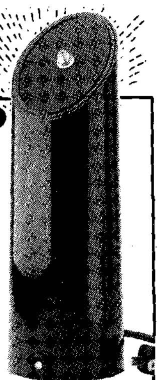
na issue. We cannot stop them from going, but I will ask the Foreign Ministry to streamline the traffic between Tokyo and Beijing."

And so on. Japanese politicians seem to think nothing of indulging in such displays of infighting and ineptitude in full view of another nation's leaders. A little more than a week after the row over China subsided, Iraq invaded Kuwait, and Nagatacho threatened to erupt again. Should Kaifu now go ahead with a trip to the Middle East scheduled for August 16th? Friends in Nagatacho have told me that the L.D.P. was for once too embarrassed to fight this one out publicly. But the issue bounced back and forth until three days before Kaifu's scheduled departure. Finally, on August 13th, a Foreign Ministry official announced that the Prime Minister was too busy deciding on Tokyo's contribution to the international effort in the Persian Gulf to make his trip. Those close to Kaifu admitted that the real calculation had to do with preserving his standing in the public-opinion polls, and with the judgment that there was little to be gained, and much that could be lost, by going ahead.

EVEN in Tokyo, you do not get to see much of what lies behind political events in Japan. Nagatacho is among the most impenetrable sections of what is an opaque society to begin with, and watching it is like watching an extended shadow play. In this part of the world, those who inhabit the political realms are left mostly to themselves as long as the economy is turning over at a satisfactory pace.

Nagatacho is ordinarily almost serene at this time of year. Most members of the Diet, like American congressmen, have by now departed on visits to their home districts, on holidays in Japan's cool inland mountains, or on "fact-finding" tours abroad. (Apart from China, another popular destination this year is the Soviet Union.) The Diet building, a kind of terraced pyramid at one end of Nagatacho, has a way of seeming detached from the city around it, even though it sits on top of a hill overlooking much of central Tokyo; now it is closed and utterly quiet. Partway down the hill, at the other end of the district, is the Prime Minister's residence, reputedly a Frank Lloyd Wright structure, which no recent Prime Minister has used except to greet



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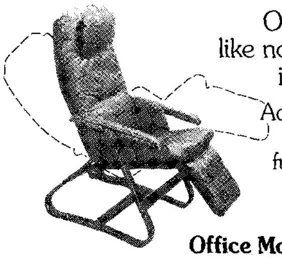

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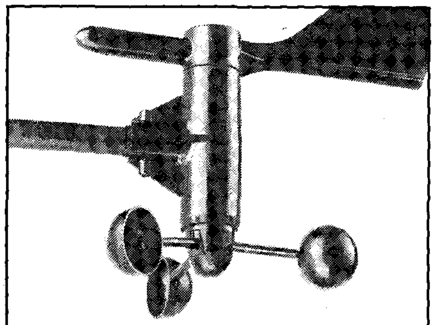

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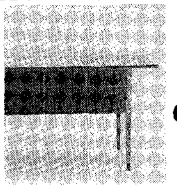

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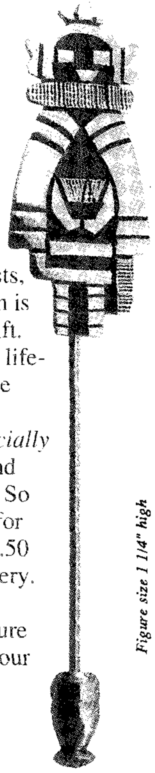
official visitors and the press. It, too, is dark at this time of year.

Just as Kaifu's post-Houston troubles were beginning to mount, I went to Nagatacho to talk to Keith Henry, an American Japanologist serving on the staff of Kazuo Aichi, who is among the Liberal Democrats' more forward-looking legislators. Henry is one of a dozen or so foreigners who work in Nagatacho; their tasks range from fetching tea and writing letters to advising on policy matters and serving as emblems of their employers' commitment to *kokusaika*, or "internationalization"—a broad notion that it is almost compulsory for Diet members to favor these days. Henry has watched Kaifu closely from the beginning of his term, and I wanted to hear how he matched the Prime Minister's ever-rising popularity with the political humiliation he has suffered from the day he took office. In the beginning, Kaifu had not even been permitted to name his own Cabinet; on the state visits he made early in his term, one of the Party elders was almost certain to upstage him by making a concurrent trip to a more important capital. Over the months, Japanese voters had become accustomed to this sort of thing. Like all Japanese Prime Ministers, Kaifu was, in effect, appointed by Party leaders, and can be removed by them at any time they decide to call for general elections. When Kaifu marked his first anniversary in power, on August 9th, more people may have supported him than almost any other postwar Prime Minister, but the past few weeks have demonstrated that he has had less power than any of his predecessors.

Henry, a fluent speaker of Japanese who has accumulated a scholar's knowledge of Liberal Democratic politics over the years, said he thought that Kaifu was "Jimmy Carter without an Iranian hostage crisis—yet." Like Carter, he feels, Kaifu is thoughtful and well-intentioned, is a political outsider, and is looked upon favorably by the average citizen, but commands no respect where it counts—in his case, in the sequestered world of Nagatacho. When Bush and others deal with Kaifu, they are really dealing with the politicians who control him, and the agenda of those politicians is vastly different from the Prime Minister's. "It's not politically opportune to attack Kaifu openly anymore, but I'd say he's more tightly controlled than ever," Henry told me. "You need to be liked by foreigners, and it's fine to be popular with the people. But you need another face, too—you need to be able to go for the jugular, to instill fear. Either Kaifu controls or he's controlled, and my feeling is that he hasn't stood up to anyone yet. The minute he tries to push an initiative, the Party elders can become very vicious. Modest people finish last here, and for Kaifu every day is a fight for survival. That's politics, of course, but what does it say about the expectations that others have of Japan? It's not at all clear that Japan can do any of the things it should do, because the country doesn't really know where it's going right now."

WHERE Japan is going is a question that has preoccupied the Japanese for at least a century, and, in its current form, since the mid-nineteen-eighties. This year, it has been almost impossible to escape the issue in conversations with Tokyoites—or, indeed, in casual meetings with people in many provincial cities and rural villages. To put it very broadly (as the Japanese like to do), it is now well recognized here that Japan must find a new place for itself in international affairs—a place commensurate with its wealth and power. One set of events which has provoked this introspective mood is the Recruit-bribery scandal, which began to be uncovered two years ago. The Recruit Company, a publishing and communications concern, was found to have sold to the entire leadership of the L.D.P., and to a number of its junior members, many millions of dollars' worth of stock in a new real-estate subsidiary at deep discounts before the stock was listed. The total amount involved has never been made public. Although these stock sales were technically legal, the affair underscored the inadequacies of a political system in which power is based solely on one's ability to raise funds in Tokyo and distribute them around the country in exchange for votes.

Then, this spring, the United States demanded that Japan dismantle some of its most basic barriers to free trade and increase its spending on roads, airports, and other facilities that would encourage the Japanese to consume more and enjoy the benefits of the wealth they have accumulated. The Japanese have not quite got over the Structural Impediments Initiative, or S.I.I., as the



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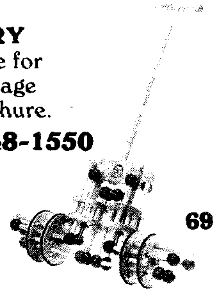

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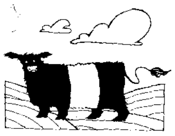

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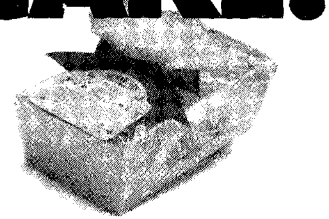
talks that included those demands are known; for another nation to seek such fundamental changes has pushed the Japanese to look more closely at the way they live, even though the ceaseless routine goes on. Most Tokyoites went off on their vacations in August, however briefly. (Vacations in Japan are normally a week long.) But there are reminders everywhere of the inadequacies of life in the world's wealthiest nation. This summer, a murderous heat wave and an unusually dry rainy season sent everyone to the beaches on weekends, so that they were as stiflingly mobbed as the Ginza shopping district. As always, highways were jammed, and seats on trains and planes were almost impossible to find: these are among the commonplace knots here that American negotiators are trying to untie. Japan's life-as-usual texture, like the patience of the Japanese, never seems to wear thin, no matter what momentous events are taking place, but the S.I.I. exercise has stirred a latent impatience. If you look past the calm surface that the Japanese assiduously maintain for the benefit of outsiders, it is easy to see that they feel frustrated by their lives, and are ready for the kinds of change the Americans are urging.

Not long ago, I visited the coastal city of Okayama, a four-hour ride south of Tokyo by *shinkansen*, or bullet train. On a Sunday morning, Satsuki Eda, a Diet member and the chairman of a small opposition party named the United Social Democrats, took me with him as he was driven on his rounds to various constituencies. The word *okayama* means "hills and mountains," and the city, which quietly faces the sea, lies in a bowl formed by low peaks. Just after dawn, we set out to meet with a group of farmers in an open field outside the city, and we went on to a meeting of one of Eda's political-support clubs at a local hotel, to a high-school swimming meet, and to a meeting of unionists held at the junction of two busy expressways. At the hotel, one of Eda's supporters, a stout man named Yukio Okami, interrupted a white-suited country-and-Western band to tell the gathering, "Politics are changing all over the world, and this year will change a lot for us. In the end, we will need a new politics in Japan, in which every person counts. Eda-*sensei* is the leader of our small party, but before that his task is to work toward this new system." (*Sensei* means "mas-



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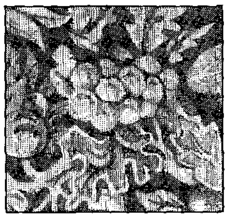

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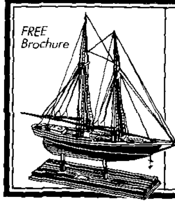

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ter," and all Diet members are referred to as such.)

Eda, a modest man of forty-nine, is a former Oxford scholar and was a district-court judge in and around Toyko before running for elected office. That background gave him a keen interest in political systems and in issues like the proper separation of powers, the absence of which he sees as contributing to Japan's political problems. He is accepted on all sides here as an objective commentator, and is interviewed often on television talk shows and by the press. His importance is based partly on his personal integrity and partly on the small size of his party (it holds only six of the Diet's five hundred and twelve seats), which makes it clear that Eda has no pretensions to a high place in the national hierarchy.

After the meeting at the edge of the expressways, we went on to the most interesting encounter of the day. We drove to the city of Kurashiki, where Eda had helped organize a seminar aimed at drawing young people into the political process and, as he put it, getting them to try answering the question "Where are we?" Kurashiki is not in Eda's district, but he attended, along with a legislator from the Japan Socialist Party—the largest opposition party here—and a few local notables. The room, at the Kurashiki Chamber of Commerce Building, was crowded. A lively audience—of all ages, it turned out—wanted to know from Eda and the others how election districts should be redrawn and the constitution rewritten, how the opposition parties could play a more meaningful role, whether the number of Diet seats should be lowered, and how the system could be reshaped to reduce the dependence of prefectures and local governments on subsidies allotted by the Liberal Democrats in return for blocks of votes.

Questions like these are being raised all over Japan these days, but I was stunned, nonetheless, by what Eda had shown me. Americans tend to think of the Japanese as a people who stubbornly resist change in their lives—who cling to tradition as to a raft in the chaotic sea of modern life. But I could think of no similar gathering in the United States at which I might expect to hear ordinary people discussing such fundamental changes as these; our national mythology about the perfection of our system seems to block out such thinking, and its absence is one of the many things the Japanese do not understand about us. Even Liberal Democratic Diet members in Tokyo often give me the impression, in private talks, that the need to reform the way Japan works—to make its economic and political systems reflect its place in the world—is understood. The problem is that nobody yet knows how to do it, since nobody in Nagatacho wants to pay the price. But at least the Japanese are looking, while many American intellectuals and politicians have started to say that they are waiting for a crisis to snap the United States to attention. Perhaps, I thought, it is we Americans who will eventually be proved incapable of making the adjustments we need, and not the Japanese.

On the drive back to Okayama, through small towns that seemed to run into one another, Eda explained his perspective on the transition that Japan is undergoing. "I think of Japanese politics in terms of long stages," he said. "In 1868, the Meiji restoration introduced the idea of a modern national state. That was a palace revolt and didn't involve many people. After our defeat in 1945, we established a democratic system. But people were not ready then to activate the system, to make it work, because that stage was managed by the Allies and involved only the leadership." Eda paused and looked out the window, his eyes following the concrete telephone poles and the tangle of wires that dipped and rose between them—ubiquitous features of Japan, which mar its cities and towns and much of its countryside. "Now we are at a third stage in our democratic revolution," he went on. "Japanese people are still not accustomed to voting on the basis of their individual views of things. They vote out of belonging—to a family, a community, a company, a union. The right to vote was given to us; it didn't come as the result of a victory, so it's not yet seen as precious. But people are learning. They are preparing now for a system that works better, for something that will bring democracy in Japan closer to the way it is elsewhere."

SINCE last year, when the Recruit affair grew into the most damaging in the long sequence of political scandals that dot postwar Japanese history, there has been a nascent sense in Nagatacho that it is useless to try to prevent the third stage of the evolution that Eda described. But the man to whom the Japanese look to oversee this momentous change—or, at least, to see that it begins well—has not emerged as a natural leader. Kaifu was plucked from nowhere, it seemed, after his immediate predecessors, Noboru Takeshita and Sosuke Uno, were forced from office by financial and sex scandals, respectively. (Takeshita stepped down after the Recruit controversy enveloped his entire administration, and Uno had only two months in office before revelations of his previous dalliances with a geisha forced his resignation.) Kaifu's virtues were that he led a more-or-less clean private life and had accepted stock from the Recruit Company worth only fourteen million yen, or about a hundred thousand dollars—one of the lowest amounts cited for a member of the Liberal Democratic Party. (It was said then that Kaifu was simply not important enough in the Party for Recruit to bother with.) He was never intended to be more than an interim figure—someone unsoiled who would merely sit there while the governing party regained its balance. And he was certainly never supposed to go to Houston; Takeshita and Shintaro Abe, a former Secretary-General of the L.D.P., along with some other Party leaders, had planned to remove Kaifu by letting relations with the United States fall apart and then claiming that it was essential to install a more experienced politician. It was only Kaifu's success in cultivating a smooth relationship with Washington that made such a move impossible.

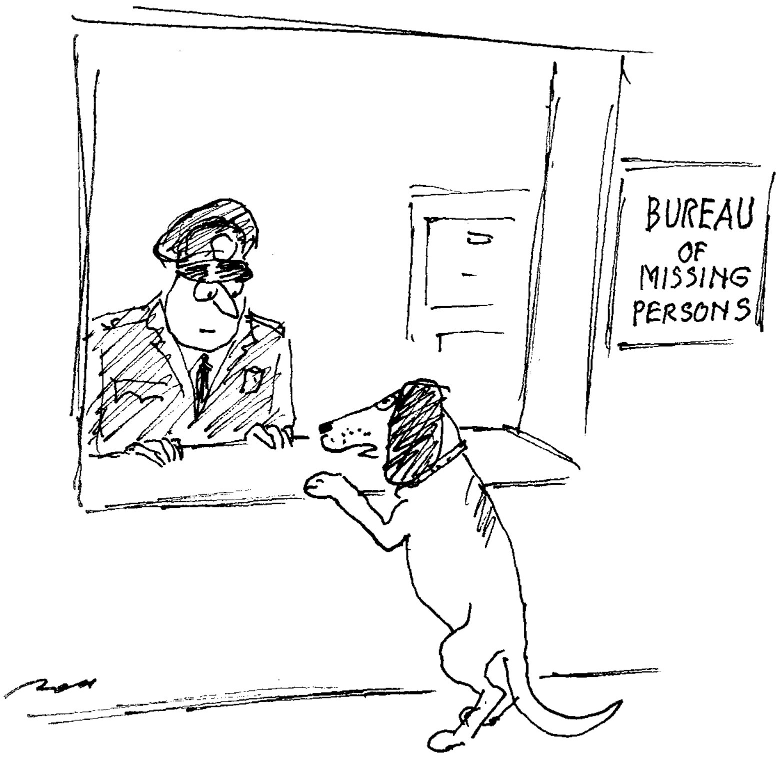
One reason recent events here have so troubled many Japanese is that they reveal the L.D.P.'s conservative Old Guard's complete failure to recognize that Kaifu took office at a crucial moment in Japan's political life. Nor does this Old Guard seem to understand how much it has done to create that moment. After thirty-five years of L.D.P. rule, it has become apparent that the Party is too isolated to grasp these things. It was inevitable, for instance, that the next Prime Minister, whoever he was, would begin pressing for political reforms to give more power to urban consumers, and to turn politics away from personalities and fund-raising—"money politics," it is called here—and toward the real issues facing the nation's leadership. It was inevitable, too, that he would focus on pressing international questions, such as trade, because the Party elders had been wrapped up in the Recruit affair for so long that virtually everything of importance to the outside world had been put on hold.

The feeling you get in conversations here these days is one of deep uncertainty about the future. It is easy to say, and many do, that nothing will happen by way of change in Japan, because so little has changed for so long. On the other hand, the Kaifu administration has made political reform a national priority, and its proposals for such reforms are due by November 29th, when the Diet celebrates its centenary. Many Japanese look to them with anticipation as an important first step. "Instead of leaving things to the discretion of the Liberal Democrats, the Prime Minister must give full play to his leadership," an *Asahi Shimbun* editorialist wrote in the edition of August 1st. But others wonder whether Kaifu may be simply too innocent to play a leadership role.

One occasion for such questioning occurred on July 16th, shortly after his delayed return from the United States. That afternoon, Kaifu met with the press at the official residence and boasted to reporters of his new first-name relationships with Bush and Canada's Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, and of the jokes he had told at summit dinners. He had quipped, he said with a smile, that Secretary of State Baker's name, which is pronounced "Beika" here, is the Japanese word for "rice price," government supports for which are a subject of mounting dispute between Washington and Tokyo. He complained lightly that not everyone had understood his jokes. After one of them, he said, Bush had turned to him, put his finger to his lips, and said "Shhh!"

How was one to judge such a display? The national press, understandably, was incredulous. "IS HE *STILL* IN HOUSTON?" the *Asahi* asked emphatically in a headline the next day. But there is more to it than mere political inexperience, or a desire to hold on to a visible triumph. The other day, I was visiting the home of Kenzaburo Oe, a noted Japanese novelist, and at one point I happened to remark that I thought the work of an emerging young writer here seemed childish. Oe's eyes lit up behind his round, tortoiseshell glasses. "This is a very pejorative thing to say in English, and you could say it of Kaifu and mean it the same way," Oe said. "But if you say it to a Japanese it will be taken as a compliment. The same is true of 'naïve.' These words mean that you are innocent, that you are sensitive. Japanese culture is very childish. When a Japanese is with a Westerner, he will always try to develop a nephew-uncle relationship. We are giants in commerce, but we always try to behave with innocence."

However one chooses to define his relationship



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with Bush, Kaifu is clinging to it for all it's worth these days. Along with his popular support, it is the key to his survival in Nagatacho. He has now visited Bush three times: once, in Washington, just after he took office; again, in Palm Springs, last March, when the S.I.I. talks threatened to fall apart; and then, in Houston, just before the summit. Now he is to visit the United States again at the end of September, ostensibly to attend the World Summit for Children at the United Nations headquarters, in New York, but actually to see Bush. Those close to him say that he could thus not have visited China in any case, since it would be impolitic at this point to go straight from Beijing to Washington. All around Kaifu, the leaders of the four powerful factions that control the Liberal Democrats—the factions in which real power resides—are jockeying constantly for position. Kaifu sits at the center with no factional support: he is a second-line member of a second-line faction. A young Japanese friend of mine serving his apprenticeship in Nagatacho remarked recently, "Kaifu has 'the Bush faction.' "

It is not a relationship to which Bush came easily. As recently as February, when Bush and Baker asked Kaifu to meet them in Palm Springs, on extremely short notice, the view in the State Department and in the Embassy here was that Kaifu was scarcely worth cultivating. When he was named to office last year, most American officials did not know who he was. But Bush, in order to fend off the trade hawks on Capitol Hill, wanted to see quick progress on the S.I.I. talks, which had an end-of-June deadline. Just before that meeting, a friend from Washington handed me a copy of an informal memorandum that had been written in the State Department for the use of officials in the Tokyo Embassy. It explained how Baker was to be briefed in preparation for his meeting with Kaifu, and it read, in part:

> Baker will be told that P.M. Kaifu's visit represents the last opportunity for the L.D.P. leadership to agree to work responsibly with the White House to avoid a political crisis in U.S.-Japan relations this year. . . . The trouble is that P.M. Kaifu himself is powerless, just a figure-head for former P.M. Takeshita, and the L.D.P. "Old Guard". . . . The Old Guard now finds itself in a fundamental dilemma, since if it agrees to let Kaifu take steps to avoid a political crisis this year, then the excuse for dumping Kaifu, due to problems in the U.S.-Japan relationship, will be lost. Baker will be told that he must go "back channel" to Takeshita, Miyazawa and Abe to call upon his past friendships/relationships with them in forging the economic stability of the Reagan years.

Just after the Palm Springs meeting, Noboru Takeshita flew to Washington and was received by Bush, much as Miyazawa was after the Houston summit. In almost any other capital, these visits would have been considered serious breaches of diplomatic protocol: Takeshita and Miyazawa are power brokers who have been disgraced by corruption and now hold no office other than their Diet seats. But Bush's sessions with them were accepted here matter-of-factly, as a natural consequence of the Prime Minister's political limitations. As for Bush, he was clearly taking no chances with Kaifu—not with congressional elections due in the autumn. Not long ago, it was reported here that Bush uses open telephone lines, rather than secured official lines, to talk to Kaifu, on the assumption that Kaifu will be more inclined to take action in response to conversations that may be leaked to the Japanese bureaucracy.

But the Palm Springs meeting, on March 2nd and 3rd, at which Kaifu and Bush did agree to iron out the trade problems, proved a turning point in their personal relationship. Bush discovered that if he could get Kaifu alone, away from the bureaucrats and politicians who were controlling him, it was possible to work with him. Part of the conversation they had is often referred to in Nagatacho and in the national press. On July 29th, the *Mainichi Shimbun* quoted Bush in its Sunday magazine as saying, "You have to understand my situation. I have to fend off the 'Japan bashers' in Congress. Help me. In return, I'll help your administration."

Those two words, "Help me," have resounded in Japanese political circles ever since they were made public; for Kaifu, they are like a trophy brought home to be proudly displayed. In them is implied something that Japan has come to desire deeply over the past few years: a relationship of equality and interdependence with the United States, and acknowledgment of it by an American leader. Bush has spoken often of the "global partnership" the United States wants to form with Japan to carry both nations into the next century, but there is a widespread suspicion here that what Americans really want is to have Washington continue to set policy and have Japan pay for it.

After Kaifu came home from California, he delivered an interim report on the S.I.I. talks which satisfied both the Bush Administration and its critics in the Congress. Among other things, it committed Japan to spending four hundred and thirty trillion yen, about three trillion dollars, on public-works projects over the next decade; to more strictly enforcing anti-monopoly regulations and other laws that prohibit exclusionary business practices; to opening up the *keiretsu* system, through which companies in a large industrial group trade with one another whenever that is possible; to easing the entry of foreign retailers into Japan; and to taking steps to reduce extremely high land prices in Japanese cities. To boost America's economic competitiveness, Washington, in turn, committed itself to taking an equally far-reaching set of remedial measures, including a reduction in the federal deficit, improved educational and training opportunities, steps to encourage savings, and many others.

The S.I.I. exercise has provoked an enormous amount of debate here. It has its critics on both sides, and there is a great deal of skepticism about how much of what is in the agreement will actually get done. Many of those opposed to the S.I.I. view it as an invasion of Japanese culture which the United States had no business launching. James C. Abegglen, a prominent author and business consultant here, called it "bad manners" during a dinner speech he gave recently at the Tokyo American Club. John P. Stern, who heads a Tokyo office for the American electronics industry, said, "The Europeans accept Japanese customs in Japan but insist the Japanese be good Europeans in their own countries. We let the Japanese behave like Japanese in our country, while telling them to act like Americans in Japan. We're asking for all the wrong things. This agreement isn't going to get us anywhere."

But form and content are often interchangeable in trade negotiations—especially negotiations between Washington and Tokyo—and on June 28th, just before the Houston summit, Kaifu delivered a final report on the talks which said what Bush had wanted it to say. That consolidated the Bush-Kaifu relationship. In Houston, Bush en-

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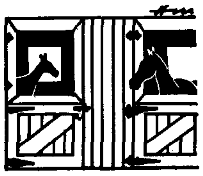
couraged the first-name style now established between them, which is a kind of diplomatic allusion to the "Ron-Yasu" friendship that former President Reagan formed with Yasuhiro Nakasone, who was Japan's Prime Minister before Takeshita took over, in 1987. Other Japanese leaders had made promises that later turned out to be empty; Kaifu had delivered, the Bush people figured, although the S.I.I. still remains largely in the realm of intentions. After Houston, even Takeshita gave Kaifu a public seal of approval: on July 20th, he not only pronounced Kaifu's summit performance a success but added the absolutely untrue assertion that the Prime Minister had his support.

In the past few weeks, however, it has begun to look as if Washington might have carried its enthusiasm for Kaifu a step too far. While Bush and Kaifu were meeting privately before the Houston summit, an Administration official travelling with the President told Japanese officials that Kaifu was "the best Prime Minister since Shigeru Yoshida"—a reference to the nation's first significant leader of the postwar era, appointed in 1946, under the supervision of the Allied occupation forces. Apart from diminishing the somewhat special place Yoshida holds in Japan's recent history, that sweeping comment, downgrading thirteen other national leaders one level each, proved too much for Nagatacho and for sections of the Japanese media. While it is important for Japan to be liked by the Americans, it is also important for it not to be too well liked at this point, because that raises uncomfortable questions about Japan's continuing dependence on the United States and the real limits it accepts in order to remain under the American security umbrella. To one extent or another, all Japanese want to live in "the Japan that can say no," to quote the title that Shintaro Ishihara, the controversial neo-nationalist, gave the book he collaborated on last year with Akio Morita, the chairman of the Sony Corporation. Any Japanese leader's ability to say no is especially important now, because if he appears unable to do so he can be accused of sacrificing the national interest to the Republican election campaign this autumn. Since the "George-Toshiki" relationship was unveiled, Japanese newspaper correspondents in Washington have begun referring to Kaifu as "Mr. Yes, Sir" and "Secretary-General of the Bush faction." The very thing that improved Kaifu's standing so markedly among voters is now beginning to count against him.



Kaifu is the second Prime Minister in postwar history to speak over the heads of the political elders directly to Japanese voters and consumers. (The first was Nakasone, a man finally judged to be long on sweeping gestures but lacking in substance.) The fact that the Bush Administration made similar appeals, apparently in a calculated effort to play the role of an opposition party in Japan, did not present much of a problem when the S.I.I. agreement was being negotiated. An extensive telephone poll conducted just before the interim agreement was made public showed more than eighty per cent of those surveyed to be in favor of the sweeping changes to which Kaifu was about to agree. *Gaiatsu*, or foreign pressure, had obviously contributed, and that was nothing new: every Prime Minister since Yoshida had used it as something to point to when difficult things needed to get done.

But the S.I.I. process and Kaifu's current predicament with regard to his relationship with Washington tell a lot about how much Japan has already changed—how quickly it is outgrowing the submissiveness that characterized its dealings with the United States over the past four decades. During Kaifu's post-Houston difficulties, I had a visit from Kan Ito, a Japanese political consultant who lives in Washington and returns to Tokyo several times a year. "Personally, I was offended by the way the United States talked to Japan during the S.I.I.," Ito told me. "The whole process was interference in Japanese life. But the S.I.I. agenda will be good for us, because it will result in a more productive and efficient economy. If a teacher hits you, you study. You don't want to be hit, but you know you should study. It's the same between Washington and Tokyo. We should have taken all the steps required under the S.I.I. agreement by ourselves. But we couldn't do it without *gaiatsu*. In that sense, we're still immature. But we're mature enough to accept that it is good for Japan to go ahead with it."

Kaifu seems to personify this halfway stage for the majority of the Japanese. Politically, he has always been a creature of others, and he seems to want to stay one, in spite of his position. He rose in the Party as a protégé of the late Takeo Miki, who served as Prime Minister in the mid-nineteen-seventies. Kaifu quickly adopted Miki's taste for polka-dot ties, and, as a mark of devotion, he will wear no other pattern to this day. Such details are treated with derision in Nagatacho, but they contribute in some small way to Kaifu's popularity. (So far, Miki is the only postwar Japanese leader to have left office untainted by political corruption.) Kaifu is not tall, as Nakasone was, and has none of Nakasone's taste for theatrics, but he can stand comfortably with foreigners, the way Nakasone did. He is not threatening or distant or stern in his television appearances, like most other Japanese politicians, but he is serious. Above all, he has managed to get things done without appearing to be more than average, and in that he represents a kind of ideal for the Japanese. Like previous leaders, Kaifu does not live in the Prime Minister's official residence; he does not live in a walled estate, either, but in a modest Tokyo apartment. His only marks of distinction, people say, are a deep voice and an eloquent control of the language.

In Nagatacho, Kaifu has struggled to turn weakness into strength. As each Diet member begins his career, he becomes a member of a circle of politicians, bureaucrats, and industrialists with common interests. Such circles are known as *zoku*, or tribes, and they are the focus of the politicians' legislative careers and determine the direction in which favors flow. Kaifu's *zoku* is not construction or heavy industry, which have been favored by other leaders, but, rather, education. He knew little of fiscal, foreign, or industrial policy before taking office. Kaifu may have no power other than what he is permitted by others to exercise, but because he has done so little fund-raising or pork-barrelling over the years, neither does he have debts. He is unusually free of the political baggage that most leaders accumulate on their way to the Prime Minister's office. And, because he has no factional interests to protect, he can treat the four leading factions among the Liberal Democrats more or less evenhandedly. Kaifu has been left in office this long because he has posed no threat to the Party leadership and because the factions have produced no clear successor. To a certain extent, it is as if the governing party had determined that it would rather not have a national leader at this important moment in Japan's history. Until recently, such a situation may have seemed to outsiders only another of Japan's political peculiarities, but it is unlikely to seem unimportant ever again.

ON July 31st, a hot, cloudless Tuesday, Noboru Takeshita, Shintaro Abe, and Yasuhiro Nakasone met at a country club outside Tokyo to play what may have been the most talked-about round of golf in East Asia this year. Newspapers prepared readers beforehand for the event, and afterward many of them carried pictures of the threesome on the eighteenth green, smiling almost identical smiles under their golf caps, while grasping their putters. The object of the event and its attendant publicity, as political commentators made clear to anyone who might have missed it, was to remind Japan of just where in the L.D.P. power still resides. Friends in Nagatacho told me it was also an occasion for the Party's kingmakers to map a new political strategy for themselves. When Nakasone stepped down, in late 1987, these three had already agreed that the Prime Ministership would be passed around among Takeshita, Abe, and Kiichi Miyazawa for many years to come. Now they wanted to resume that messily disrupted succession, including a second term for Takeshita.

The event could not have been timed more poorly—or, as it has turned out, more tellingly. Two days later, Iraq invaded Kuwait, and Japan was faced overnight with the gravest foreign-policy challenge in its postwar history. In the six weeks since the Iraqi Army moved southward, Kaifu, his personal advisers, and the bureaucrats in many ministries have struggled to formulate an appropriate response to the Persian Gulf crisis, and, in the process, have brought Tokyo under increasing international scrutiny. Should Japan support the United States and other Western allies by taking a prominent part in the buildup of multinational forces along the Saudi border with Kuwait and Iraq? Or should it act in its own interest, by negotiating the release of two hundred-odd Japanese nationals

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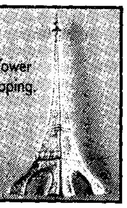

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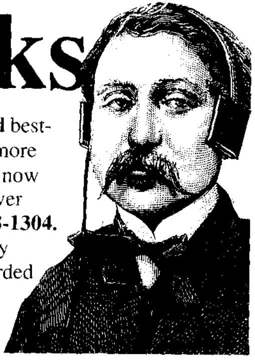

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who were caught in the area, meanwhile preserving its friendship with Iraq—since Iraq, with Kuwait, accounts for about twelve per cent of Japan's oil supplies? Similar questions have arisen before—notably during the Iran hostage crisis, at the beginning of which, in 1979, Japan quickly sidestepped Western demands that surplus Iranian oil be left in the market unsold. But, because Japan's prominence as an economic power has increased steadily in recent years, the debate hit Tokyo with full force this time. A Foreign Ministry official said to me one evening in mid-August, "Other countries have experience in reacting to these kinds of situations, and they have the legal framework, the mechanisms, to act quickly. We don't. What we're doing is something we've never done before. It's going to take time."

The month it took has been a growing embarrassment for both Japan and Kaifu. The pressures exerted upon him have come from many directions, but by the time he announced Japan's policy, no one, at home or abroad, seemed inclined to excuse him for taking so long to make up his mind. There had been a steady flow of telephone calls from Bush; at home, both the public and the bureaucracy had been divided between isolationists and internationalists, and in Japan that means divided between the past and the future. Kaifu committed Japan to the embargo of Iraqi and Kuwaiti oil fairly quickly, but then he had to determine the rest of Japan's policy with those domestic differences in mind and within the framework of the Japanese constitution, which was written by the Americans during the occupation, and which prohibits Japan from engaging in any hostile activities except in self-defense.

When Kaifu finally went on NHK, the state-controlled television network, on August 29th, he looked more haggard than I had ever seen him. He had not appeared in public for many days. And he had apparently taken the unusual step of spending some nights either at the Prime Minister's official residence or in centrally located hotels, so absorbed was he in the elusive process the Japanese call "consensus building." The package of measures he announced was almost immediately judged inadequate. Kaifu committed Japan to providing financial support for the multilateral defense force in Saudi Arabia; to supplying chartered cargo planes and ships for logistical support; to giving an unspecified amount of economic aid to Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries that have suffered because of the blockade against Iraq; and to sending a hundred doctors and other medical personnel to the Saudi border region. By mid-September, Tokyo had raised its contribution from one billion to four billion dollars, and there is more to come, we are told. But it has already become painfully apparent that the show of engagement and responsibility Kaifu offered in Houston was not much more than that—a show. The daily debate on Mideast policy now looks like only another squabble over what minimum effort will be sufficient to satisfy a new set of demands from those ever-demanding Americans.

In his speech Kaifu, for once, did not stress his relationship with Bush; instead, he tried to deny that he had had any recent close contacts with Bush, saying that the decisions he had made were entirely his own. But it soon emerged that he had telephoned Bush just before his television appearance, and that he telephoned him again the next day, when the amount that Japan would contribute to the Gulf defense force had been determined. A Western diplomat who had been briefed on the second of these conversations told me that Bush had said, roughly, "That's fine for Chapter One, Toshiki, but I'm more interested now in hearing about Chapter Two."

Meanwhile, despite all the anguish and confusion the Mideast crisis has caused, Takeshita and his allies have never lost sight of their primary concern. And, true to form, Western diplomats, including Michael H. Armacost, Washington's Ambassador to Tokyo, have more or less ignored Kaifu and paid many visits to the Party's Old Guard to learn the direction of Japanese policy. Over dinner at a European Ambassador's residence a few evenings ago, one of the guests, a European who was also of Ambassador rank, exclaimed, "All that these politicians can talk about is how much they hate Kaifu, how frustrating they find it that he is *still* in office, and how important it is that one of them become Prime Minister! We've been shocked by all that has happened this month, and by what the Japanese have come up with

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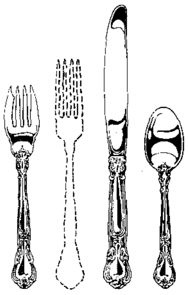

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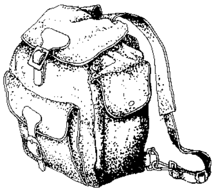

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after all this time. Personally, I've given up on them. For a long while, I held on to the hope that they would change for the better when circumstances required it. Not anymore. I've concluded now that they're hopeless."

One of the things that have been driven home to me most clearly over the past few weeks is that Japanese politicians are simply not accustomed to close scrutiny by outsiders. And the fact that the Europeans are now as deeply concerned about Japan's foreign and security policies as the Americans have been for many years is a new worry for the Foreign Ministry and its diplomats. Until recently, it hadn't mattered what Japanese politicians did, because outside the economic sphere it was not especially important what Japan did. It also seems to me that many of the difficulties Kaifu has faced over the past month are due in no small measure to the actions, and the failures to act, of those more senior than he in the L.D.P. This perspective does not seem to have been entirely lost on the Japanese. On August 25th, the *Asahi* published a strongly worded article that included these judgments: "It has been a difficult summer for Japanese diplomacy inside the L.D.P. Apart from scattered remarks heard from time to time, there has been no serious discussion of the Gulf crisis in the Party, nor any exchanges of opinion with the government. Those who could have taken a leading role did not."

Two days after Kaifu's television appearance, when the early returns were in on Tokyo's policy, I visited Reizo Utagawa, a senior researcher at the International Institute for Global Peace. The institute was founded by Nakasone soon after he left office, and many people have viewed it as a vehicle for Nakasone's effort to remain involved in international affairs—the area that interested him most when he was Prime Minister. Because of the Nakasone connection, the institute harbors a number of astute analysts, and Utagawa, a jolly man in his middle fifties, who served as Washington correspondent of the *Mainichi Shimbun* in the nineteen-seventies, is one of them. "The Mideast problem has been a test for Japan, one that showed whether or not we can participate in international society," Utagawa said. "And, in my view, Japan has missed a very good chance. We failed the test, I think. I'm not sure that

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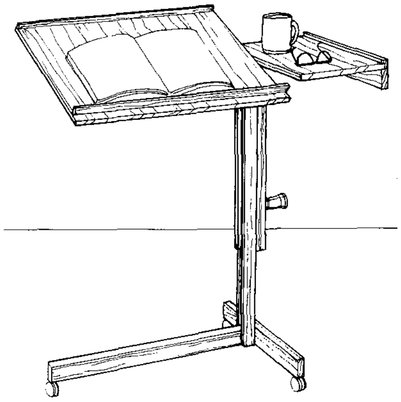

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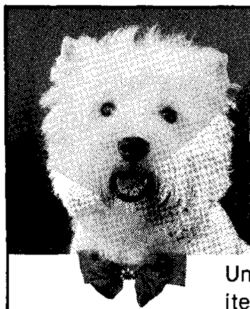

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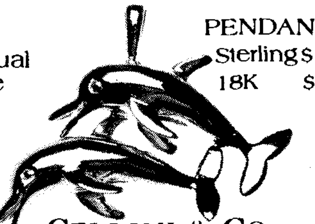

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Kaifu himself yet sees it this way. As for the others, their behavior is an enigma. It seems to me they saw this crisis only as something to use against Kaifu. But that is Nagatacho's way. It sees every occasion only as a stepping stone to more power, and nothing more than that."

It is too soon to tell what effect the Mideast crisis will have on Japan's future conduct of international affairs. Kaifu has promised sweeping changes in Japanese law to provide for swifter and broader responses to such situations. But other Prime Ministers have made those same promises in the past, to no meaningful effect. The real question is whether Japan's postwar constitution should be changed to allow Japan to play a greater role in global events. No one has engaged that issue yet, because it remains one of several taboo subjects here. But the Gulf crisis may have changed this from an "if" question to a "when" question. Utagawa believes that such a debate could begin in perhaps three years' time.

The immediate issue, however, is Kaifu's future in Nagatacho, and whether the Gulf situation will emerge as his "Iranian hostage crisis," complete with hostages. Kaifu seems to have pleased no one this time: not his American patrons; not those many Japanese who have said openly in the past few days that they are ashamed for their country; and not those few who believe that he ought to have looked out for Japan's interests in the most narrowly defined sense. For the first time, even Kaifu's public supporters have begun to question his ability to lead Japan. They ask why he has been invisible during such an important period, in contrast to a leader like Bush, and they assert that "Kaifu diplomacy," as his overseas efforts have been labelled, succeeded in the past chiefly because the course ahead was already well charted.

Midway in Kaifu's summer of troubles, I saw Eda-*sensei* again. He was arriving at Tokyo station from Okayama on a weekend afternoon, and had to drive quickly to a national teachers' convention at a large Tokyo hotel. Because I was eager to hear his thoughts on Kaifu's recent performance, we talked in the car as his driver maneuvered through the Tokyo traffic.

Among the terms used in Nagatacho to describe Kaifu, Eda said, is *karitekita neko*, meaning "borrowed cat"—a

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cat confident enough in its owner's domain but timid and uncertain in the house of another. In his evenhanded way, however, Eda seemed finally to come to Kaifu's defense. "All he has to do is stay in place until his term ends, in November of 1991—a little more than a year," he said. "His talent is average—he's not an exceptional politician. But he recognizes himself for what he is. If he didn't have large issues before him, I doubt he would survive. But he does have them—now he has to see through the commitments he made in the S.I.I. talks, and he has to carry out the reform of the electoral system. He has no ambitions to be a great Prime Minister. He only wants to complete the job that history has given him."

Twenty years ago, Roland Barthes, the philosopher and semiologist, published "Empire of Signs," a book written after a single visit to Japan. In it he analyzed certain aspects of Japanese life as "signs," and built around them a compelling, if abstract, portrait of a nation he otherwise seemed to know little about. Pointing to the fact that there are no street addresses in Japanese cities, for instance, he wrote about anonymity, identity, and "a special organization of space." And he described Tokyo, with the emperor's palace and its large grounds at the center, this way: "The city I am talking about offers this precious paradox: it does possess a center, but this center is empty." He went on, "One of the two most powerful cities of modernity is thereby built around an opaque ring of walls, streams, roofs, and trees whose own center is no more than an evaporated notion, subsisting here, not in order to irradiate power, but to give to the entire urban movement the support of its central emptiness."

Nearby Nagatacho looks nothing like the palace grounds. As a postwar creation, however, it represents present-day Japan in the same way the Fukiage Palace symbolizes the past. But, especially now that the Diet is in recess, and Nagatacho has gone temporarily quiet, it seems to me that the anonymity and the emptiness that Barthes wrote about are repeated there in another form, and that Kaifu, simply by embodying those attributes, represents the natural order of things in a capital so politically at odds with itself, and with what the rest of the world expects of it. —PATRICK L. SMITH

BOOKS

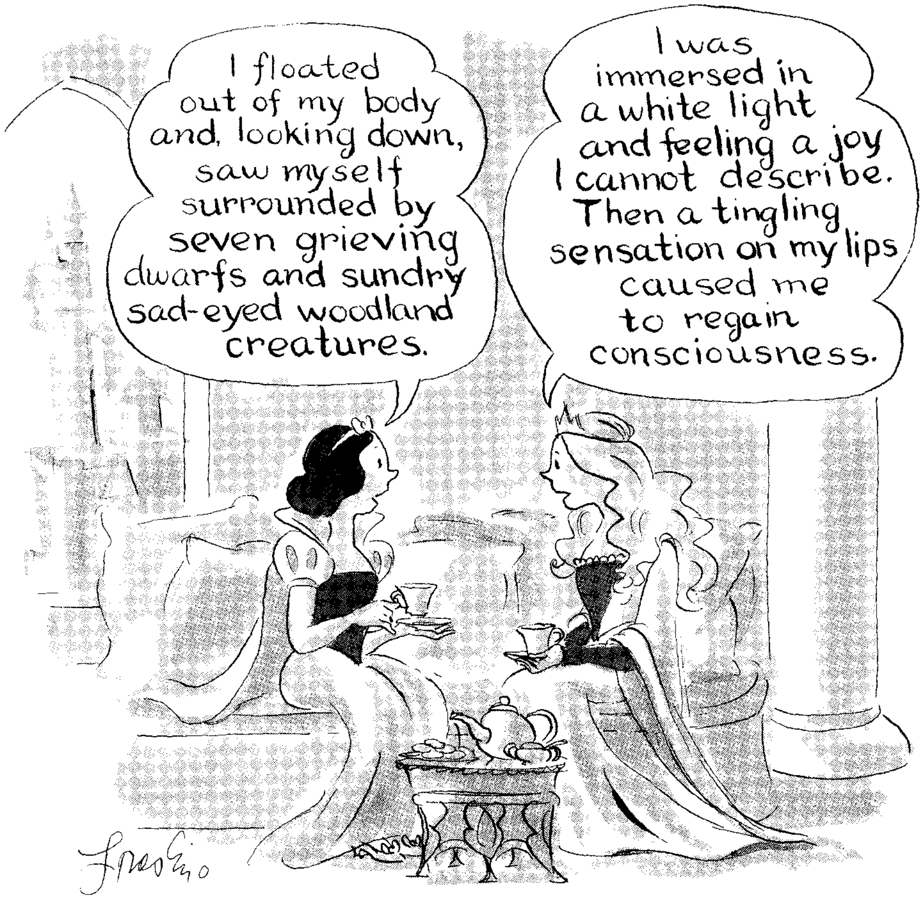
A Materialist Look at Eros

LITERATURE owes a debt to the Peruvian electorate, for recently declining to elect Mario Vargas Llosa to the thankless position of being their President. So elegant, pessimistic, and Europeanized a literary performer's candidacy for this high office, amid the perils of terrorism and the sludge of daily speechifying, seems, at our distance, even more mysterious than Norman Mailer's campaign for the New York mayoralty or Gore Vidal's gracious offer, some years ago, to serve as a senator from California. Novelists presumably understand the workings of the world, and perhaps would govern no worse than lawyers, movie stars, or retired oilmen, but why anyone with an opportunity to create imperishable texts would want to exhaust his body and fry his brain in the daily sizzle of power brokerage lies quite beyond my own imagining. At any rate, the good people of Peru, with the masses' customarily sound instinct, turned from the novelist, once the odds-on favorite, to a Japanese-Peruvian agronomical engineer, thereby releasing Vargas Llosa to the contemplative solitude and part-time irresponsibility necessary for artistic creation. He has been prolific, producing plays and criticism as well as novels. While he was hiking the mountainous campaign trail, a naughty butterfly of a book by him was flitting from couch to couch in the lamplit dens of Spanish-language readers. Now this book, billed on the jacket as "a classic of eroticism," has been published in English, as "In Praise of the Stepmother" (translated from the Spanish by Helen Lane; Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $18.95). It is, in our erotically retrenched nation, a startling document: not only would an American Presidential candidate not have written it but the National Endowment for the Arts wouldn't have given it a grant.

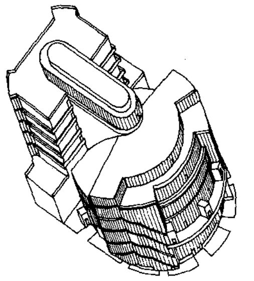
The stepmother is named Doña Lucrecia, and she lives in Lima and has just turned forty. Four months before her birthday, she married a widower, Don Rigoberto—a step taken with some trepidation, since "her first marriage had been a disaster and the divorce a nightmarish torment at the hands of money-grubbing shysters."

Don Rigoberto is the prosperous general manager of an insurance company, collects erotic art, and has one son, Alfonso, by his previous marriage. The ages of the two males are never given, but Rigoberto seems at least fifty, or a lusty fifty-five, and his son, insistently described as a "little boy," ten or so. Perhaps eleven or twelve, considering the feats he comes to perform—but there is an artistic fudging here, tiptoeing as the writer is on the edge of the repulsively perverse. A comely black maid, Justiniana, rounds out the household, and devotees of erotica will perceive that this cast of characters allows for enough combinations to be satisfactory. Vargas Llosa, whose male-dominated fiction rarely possesses the heavy aura of sensual saturation present in Gabriel García Márquez or Saul Bellow, has announced, in interviews, a liking for frank eroticism in fiction. In his superb homage to "Madame Bovary" and Flaubert, "The Perpetual Orgy"—an extended critical work that also serves Vargas Llosa as a self-description—he states, "If I am left to choose between unrealities, the one closer to the concrete has my preference over the one that is abstract: I prefer pornography, for example, to science fiction, and sentimental stories to horror tales." One of the traits he loves in Emma Bovary and in her novel is concreteness, an unashamed materialism, "something that she and I share intimately: our incurable materialism, our greater predilection for the pleasures of the body than for those of the soul, our respect for the senses and instinct, our preference for this earthly life over any other." He goes on:

> The ambitions that lead Emma to sin and death are precisely those that Western religion and morality have most savagely


I floated out of my body and, looking down, saw myself surrounded by seven grieving dwarfs and sundry sad-eyed woodland creatures.
I was immersed in a white light and feeling a joy I cannot describe. Then a tingling sensation on my lips caused me to regain consciousness.

Snow White and Sleeping Beauty Have Tea



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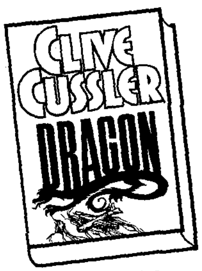

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> combated throughout history. Emma wants sexual pleasure, she is not resigned to repressing this profound sensual need that Charles is unable to satisfy because he doesn't even know that it exists; she wants to surround her life with pleasing and superfluous things, elegance, refinement, to give concrete form by way of objects to that appetite for beauty that her imagination, her sensibility, and her reading have aroused in her.

One wonders whether Flaubert would have ascribed to his heroine quite such nobility of rebellion; but the passion of his acolyte rings out with clarion effect, calling us all to realism, atheism, sensuality, and consumerism. Later in "The Perpetual Orgy," however, Emma's confusion of love and expenditure, which brings her down, is described in phrases that, though still enthusiastic, suggest a process gone awry:

> When Emma is in love, she needs to surround herself with beautiful objects, to embellish the physical world, to create a setting for herself as lavish as her sentiments. She is a woman whose enjoyment is not complete unless it takes on material form: she projects her body's pleasure into things, and things in their turn augment and prolong her body's pleasure.

The reification of passion begins to feel like a mistake; so, too, "In Praise of the Stepmother," exploring its sexual theme to rigorous, materialist extremes, brings the reader up against the possible limits of his or her own commitment to sensuality.

Don Rigoberto, in his systematic religion of bodily love, flirts with grotesquerie. He has large ears, and his weekly cycle of ritual ablutions includes, on Wednesdays, laboriously cleansing them of wax and stray hairs. Then he utilizes these perfected organs as instruments of bliss:

> "Let me hear your breasts," he would murmur, and amorously plugging his wife's nipples, first one and then the other, into the hypersensitive cavern of his two ears—which they fit into as snugly as a foot into a moccasin—he would listen to them with his eyes closed, reverent and ecstatic, his mind worshipfully concentrated as at the Elevation of the Host, till he heard ascending to the earthy roughness of each button, from subterranean carnal depths, certain stifled cadences, the heavy breathing, perhaps, of her pores opening, the boiling, perhaps, of her excited blood.

Anticipating further adventures in aural sex, he imagines his ears "avidly flattened against her soft stomach" and "could already hear the lively burbling of that flatus, the joyous cracking of a fart, the gargle and yawn of her vagina, or the languid stretching of her serpentine intestine." He anticipates, even, his marble tomb being engraved with the epitaph "Here lies Don Rigoberto, who contrived to love the epigastrium of his spouse as much as her vulva or her tongue." Behind this Rabelaisian comedy of organs a serious question is raised: What is love if it stops short at the beloved's digestive tract? Don Rigoberto's methodical and fanatical achievement is "to fall in love with the whole and with each one [illegible] the parts of his wife, *to love, separately and together,* all the components of that cellular universe." It is an achievement at which most mortals consciously or unconsciously balk, yet one that a thoroughly giddy passion, in its fever of cherishing, seems to command. Vargas Llosa's materialism defies us to set bounds to love's rampage of possession, of sensory consumption. Ideal love is an omnivorous monster.

The chapters of narrative development in "In Praise of the Stepmother" alternate with chapters of pictorial meditation, each incorporating a rather dinky color reproduction of a painting. The author is fond of such layered fictions, which alternate a detached narrative voice with slices of another substance—radio soap operas ("Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter"), the hero's consciousness ("The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta"), Amazonian-Indian recitations ("The Storyteller"). The added liveliness and the doubled perspective are obtained at the price of author-consciousness, a stilting awareness of deliberate experimentation. Here, the tale itself being fanciful and parodic, the art essays almost seamlessly blend into the gauze of quaint artifice. The chapters on paintings of nudes by Jordaens, Boucher, and Titian seem rather arch and mannered, but the one on a reddish abstraction by Fernando de Szyszlo becomes a real poem on sexual merging, and the one on a bizarre head by Francis Bacon reawakens the central theme of erotic monstrosity. Bacon's expressionistically distorted head becomes a full-bodied freak, with stumps instead of arms and legs, a slit of an ear, a hideous mouth, an eye next to his mouth. Yet his sex organ is intact, and he does not lack for lovers: "Women even come to love me, in fact, and youngsters become addicted to my ugliness. In the depths of her soul, Beauty was always fascinated by the Beast." He gives his lovers "advanced instruction in the fine art of combining desire and the horrible so as to give pleasure"; they learn "that everything is and can be erogenous and that, associated with love, the basest organic functions, including those of the lower abdomen, become spiritualized and ennobled." The category of the spirit is a surprising one, especially on the same page as the breezy sentence "It is possible that God exists, but at this point in history, with everything that has happened to us, does it matter?" It matters in that dualism continues to give sex its spice, its sense of movement from one realm to another: sex is, our lovable monster tells us, a "descent into filth," whereby we recognize ourselves.

No two erotic works are quite alike; each author comes to reveal, in the repetition that soon sets in, his or her fetishes and hot spots. Vargas Llosa, through his psychosexual anatomy of the stepmother, brings forth the idea that voyeurism is exciting not only to the seer but to the seen. Knowing that her enraptured young stepson and admirer is viewing her from the bathroom skylight, Doña Lucrecia determinedly displays herself and assumes poses of "indecent abandon," as "a subtle way of punishing the precocious libertine crouched in the darkness up above, with images of an intimacy that would shatter, once and for all, that innocence that served him as an excuse for his boldness." Afterward, in bed, she experiences "hot flashes that, from time to time, electrified her nipples," and dreams a painterly dream of Titian's Diana and her attendant, named Justiniana, making love in the forest while a little goatherd, called Foncín, watches. His silent witness is stimulating: "As I descend through the tunnel of sensation and quiver in delicious little spasms, I divine the presence of Foncín. . . . His innocent little body, glistening with sweat as he watches me and takes his pleasure by watching me, contributes a note of tenderness that subtly shades and sweetens mine." The notion that being watched is aphrodisiac implies that sexuality has a social dimension. Though closeted, we make love in a crowd—of predecessors, of simultaneous entanglements, of romantic images the culture has provided, of personified superegos. A lot of sex is "showing" others, and not just those who are present. Without a surrounding society to defy, adulterous

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passion often wilts, and a daring elopement sinks into the ranch-house funk of socially approved marriage. Sixties-style sexuality, with its hot tubs and bustling crash pads, was on to something; promiscuity, at least until it turns into a quasi-religious, obligatory form of exercise, suits our interior multiplicity. Our anfractuous psyches generate complex structures of gratification. Doña Lucrecia, having committed adultery, feels certain that the new involvement, "however obscure and complicated, however difficult to explain, enriched her marital relation, taking it by surprise and thus giving it a fresh start." She has attained, in a happy word choice, "sovereignty":

> One morning, on opening her eyes, the phrase "I have won sovereignty" came to her. She felt fortunate and emancipated, but could not have said what it was that she had been freed from.

Of course, like Emma Bovary, she is punished for her overreaching, and so is her unsuspecting husband; our erotic fabulist is a realistic novelist as well, and he does not exclude, as does the true pornographer, the tragic dimension. Yet we feel that Doña Lucrecia, by succumbing to the perverse and the dangerous, is more human than her husband, with his ridiculous, fussy, bowel-loving personal "utopia" of the body. She sins her way to sovereignty; he merely topples from paradise.

"In Praise of the Stepmother" is, like the author's other books, somewhat nasty. And its dramatization of corrupting innocence is not quite convincing—wicked little Alfonsito doesn't have the undeniable, quirky, heartbreaking sociological reality of Lolita. Vargas Llosa's moral—emphasized by an epigraph, from César Moro's "Amour à Mort"—seems to be that innocence and beauty have something sinister about them. To become human, we must make the descent into filth, into time. God Himself, Christianity claims, descended into Mary's womb. The last painting the author weaves into his text is Fra Angelico's "Annunciation"; he imagines the young Mary, confronted with a shimmering youth of an angel, asking herself, "Why did he call me queen? Why did I discover a gleam of tears in his eyes when he prophesied that I would suffer?" Love is a labyrinth we must enter even knowing that it holds the Minotaur of destruction. We leave much behind: "altruistic sentiments, metaphysics and history, neutral reasoning, good intentions and charitable deeds, solidarity with the species, civic idealism, sympathy toward one's fellow." It was a rare candidate for President who could put civic idealism in its place, and could hearken so attentively, in this impish and delicate yet fiercely serious work, to the dark complexity of sex, the epigastrium of love.

—John Updike

BRIEFLY NOTED

FICTION

A Trail of Heart's Blood Wherever We Go, by Robert Olmstead (Random House; $19.95). Life and death are always mixed up together for Eddie Ryan, a Vietnam vet, volunteer fireman, and local undertaker in the small town of Inverawe, New Hampshire; his kids play among the corpses on view in the family's living room. But the relationships between the dead and the living become more troubling when a wild and grieving lumberman comes out of the night and into their lives one snowy Christmas Eve, his partner cut in half and strapped to the front of his bulldozer. This is a runaway truck of a novel, crammed with bonsai trees, big machines, and babies who talk to God; the reader is borne along rather than exhausted by its excesses, watching wide-eyed as farmhands drown in milk tanks, captive flamingos make their getaway, and sugarhouses burst into flame. Mr. Olmstead's writing seems energized by the tensions between different ways of looking at the world, so the macho sentimentality of the book's conclusion is a surprise; it's as if the author had finally been suckered by the tall tales his characters tell. But the end of a ride like this one is bound to be disappointing, because the reader wants it to go on indefinitely—or to start all over again.

The Final Club, by Geoffrey Wolff (Knopf; $19.95). A novel about snobbery, but one that is at times guilty of putting on airs itself. The setting is Princeton in the late fifties, and the story concerns a young man from the Pacific Northwest who enrolls at that august institution, is passed over by all its genteel eating clubs—apparently because he's part Jewish—and never gets over it. Mr. Wolff shows off a considerable

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amount of sheer literary technique here—some of it effective, some of it fancy and self-conscious, and some of it just plain unconvincing—but he fails to resolve a fundamental ambivalence about the Waspy society he purports to find fault with. Fitzgerald is cited a lot, but the book has none of his romantic conviction; instead, it's just edgy and knowing.

First Hubby, by Roy Blount, Jr. (Villard; $18.95). It's 1993, and both the United States and Guy Fox have had a topsy-turvy year. First, the Marilyn Quayle coup attempt sabotaged the Bush Administration; then the Democrats stumbled with their "New Dukakis" campaign in the '92 election; and then, following a third-party Presidential victory, the new Chief Executive was struck down in a freak accident involving a fish. Clementine Fox, Guy's wife and the first woman Vice-President —Guy affectionately calls her "Your Heartbeatawayess"—thus suddenly becomes the first woman President. President Fox quickly proves to be an effective and popular Commander-in-Chief, but Guy, a professional Southern humor writer similar in many ways to Roy Blount, Jr., finds himself getting panned in the press as "the least effective first spouse since Bess Truman." Mr. Blount's novel doesn't take off right away—there are a few too many flashbacks and digressions—but when it does, it manages to be simultaneously funny about marriage and the highest office in the land, and it offers an emphatic and romantic "Yes" to the question "Can true love survive the Oval Office?"

Note: "The Woman Lit by Fireflies," by Jim Harrison, has been published by Houghton Mifflin ($19.95). One of the novellas in this collection first appeared in *The New Yorker.*

GENERAL

Too Good to Be True: The Outlandish Story of Wedtech, by James Traub (Doubleday; $21.95). This author has collected the complicated, unedifying details of the Wedtech scandal and arranged them in an absorbing narrative. The company, a small Bronx machine shop founded in 1970, realized in 1978 that since one of the partners was of Puerto Rican descent it might get special consideration for defense contracts as a minority-owned business. A congressman volunteered to help, for a price, and by 1984, when President Reagan extolled the firm as a minority enterprise that had brought employment to a depressed inner-city neighborhood, the owners and several new partners were supporting congressmen, bureaucrats, and middlemen who had intimate ties to the Administration. The original proprietors were hardly paragons, but they were taught fraud, and how to conceal it, by greedy, well-to-do, well-connected college graduates. Wedtech bled the government and, after going public, its shareholders, until there was nothing left with which to run the company. Bankruptcy, prosecutions, and convictions followed. Mr. Traub has found the right tone to make the outlandish plausible; his book is as entertaining as it is disheartening.

The Surrealist Parade, by Wayne Andrews (New Directions; $22.95 cloth, $11.95 paper). Mr. Andrews, a solidly respectable cultural historian and architectural archivist, was also, in the persona of Montagu O'Reilly, a friend and associate of the Paris Surrealists, and the author of the fiction "Pianos of Sympathy" and other writings in the Surrealist vein. The present work (which he died before completing) is a kind of history-cum-portrait of the movement, filled with anecdotal stories of its leading spirits—André Breton, Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard, Salvador Dalí. Mr. Andrews guides us through the movement's internecine warfare, noisy with cries of betrayal and sellout, and goes on to detail such things as the intricacies of the Surrealists' domestic and sexual arrangements. His book is highly diverting, and at the same time a substantial study of a movement—or, at least, a disturbance—that left its mark on the art of the twentieth century.

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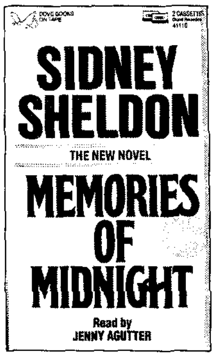

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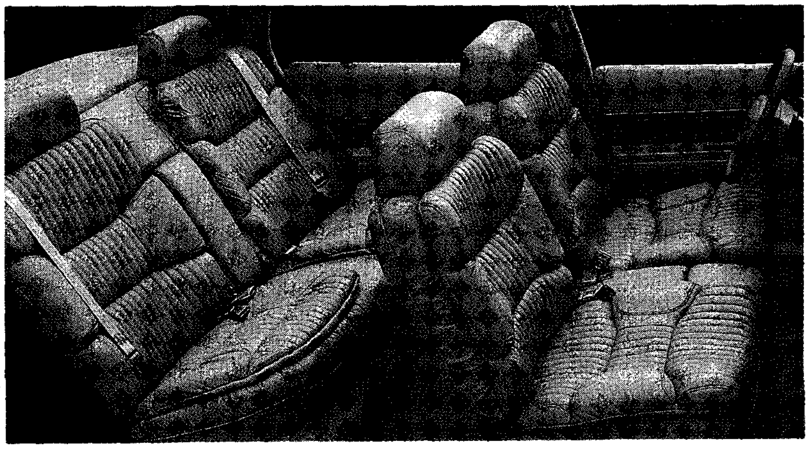

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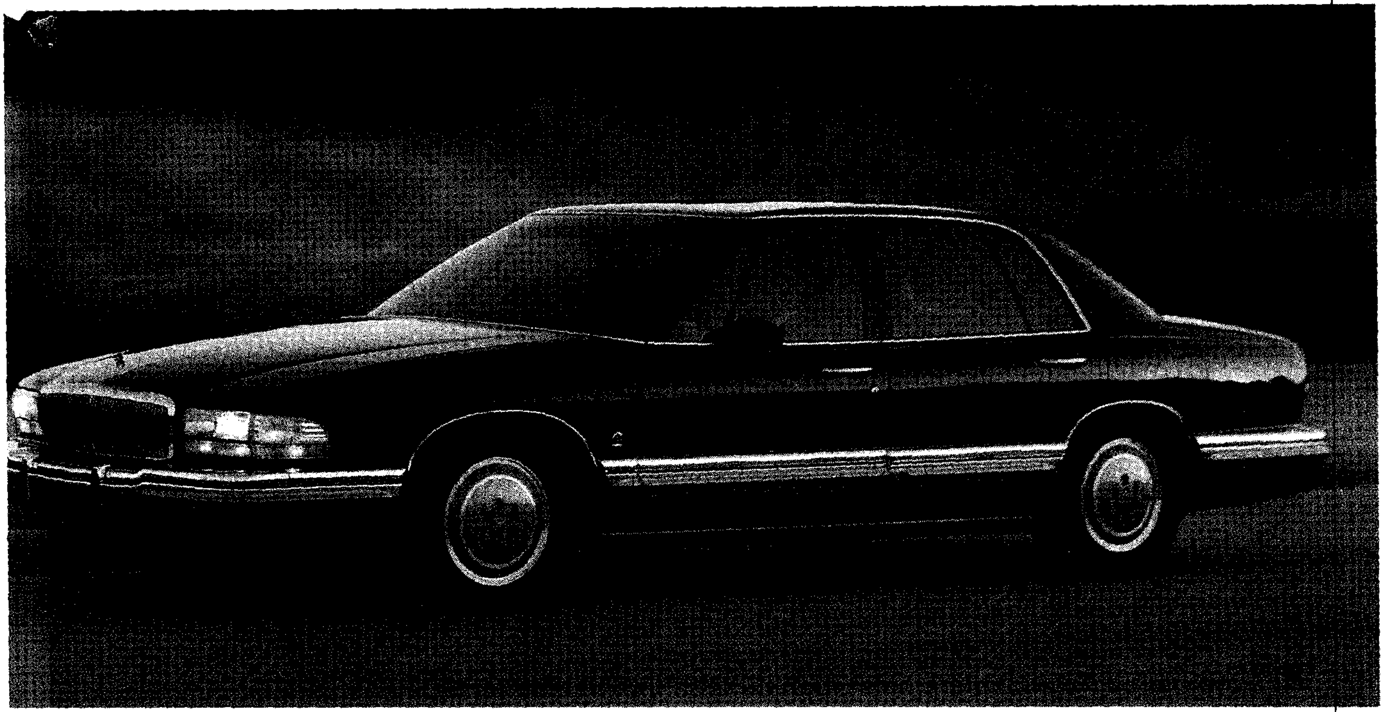

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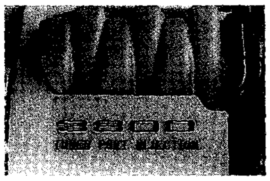

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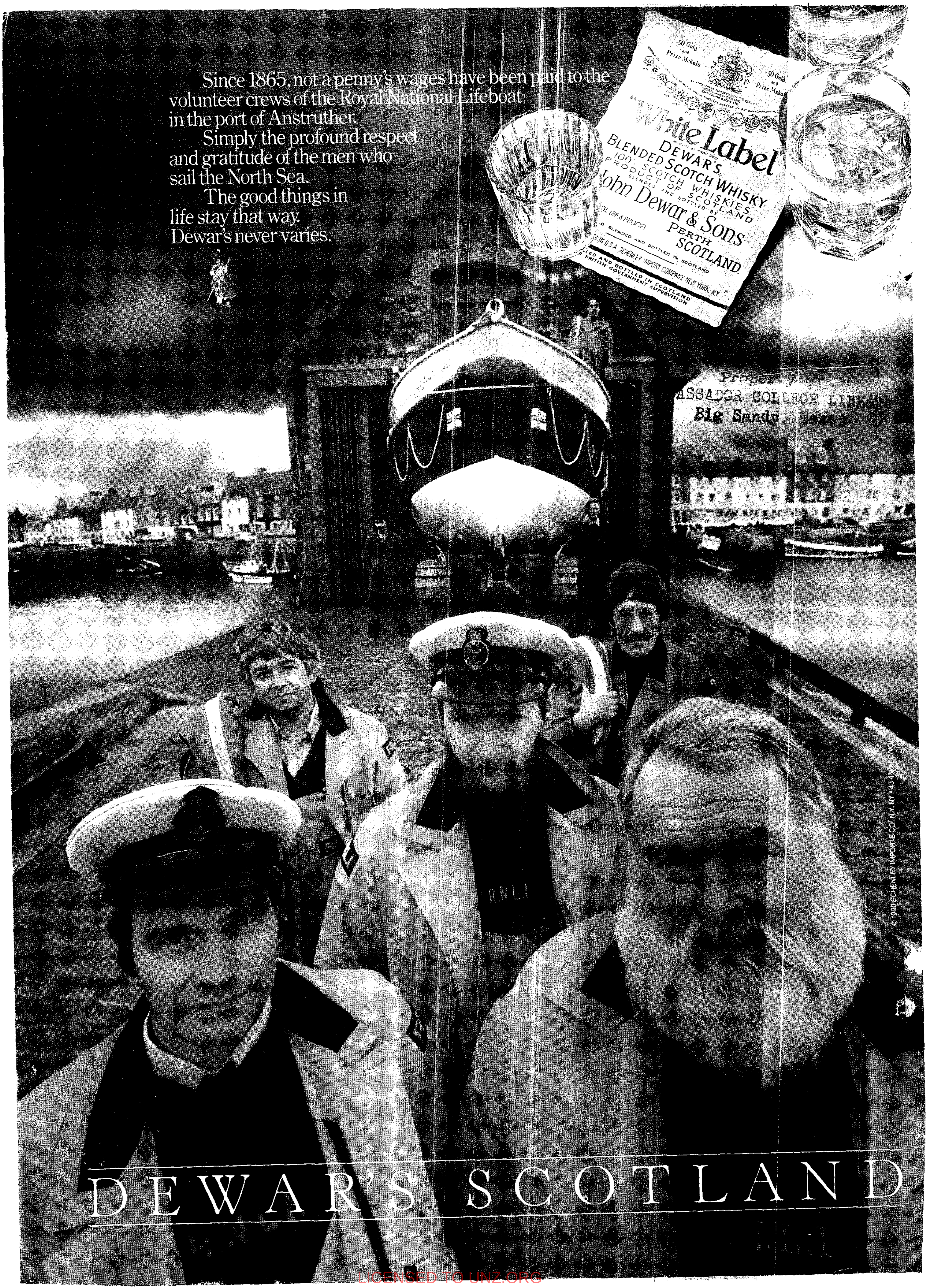
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